This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

994 e. 117.

These four volumes were presented
to the Bodleian Library,
on the Feast of St. George and Shakspere,
this 23rd day of April, 1912,
by me — E. S. Dodgson.

994 e. 117.

These four volumes were presented
to the Bodleian Library,
on the Feast of St. George and Shakespeare
this 23rd day of April, 1912,
by me — E. S. Dodgson.

Lady Williamsop's

SERMONS,

ON

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE LATE

REV. SAMUEL CARR, D.D.

PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S;
RECTOR OF ST. ANDREW UNDERSHAFT, LONDON;
AND OF
FINCHLEY, MIDDLESEX.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

THE THIRD EDITION.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR F. AND C. RIVINGTON,
NO. 62, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD;
J. ROBSON, NEW BOND-STREET; J. HATCHARD,
PICCADILLY; AND W. J. AND J. RICHARDSON, CORNHILL;
BY BYE AND LAW, ST. JOHN'S SQUARE, CLERKENWELL.

1801.

BODLEIAN
23·4·1912
LIBRARY

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

Page

GEN. xxiv. 63.

AND Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide - - - 1

SERMON II.

1 THESS. v. 23.

The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ - 19

SERMON III.

GEN. xxii. 1, 2.

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham. And he said, Behold,

CONTENTS.

Page

here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains, which I will tell thee of - - - 35

SERMON IV.

LUKE xix. 41.

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it - - - - 57

SERMON V.

PROV. xxiv. 21.

My son, fear thou the Lord and the King; and meddle not with them that are given to change - - - 73

SERMON VI.

LUKE xi. 2.

And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father, which art in heaven - 91

SERMON VII.

LUKE xi. 2.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name - - - - 103

SERMON

CONTENTS.

Page

SERMON VIII.

LUKE xi. 2.

Thy kingdom come - - - 123

SERMON IX.

MATT. vi. 9.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven 143

SERMON X.

MATT. vi. 11.

Give us this day our daily bread - - 159

SERMON XI.

MATT. vi. 12.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us - - 173

SERMON XII.

MATT. vi. 12.

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us - - 189

SERMON

CONTENTS.

Page

SERMON XIII.

MATT. vi. 13.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen. - - - 201

SERMON XIV.

2 KINGS v. 1, 2, 3.

Now Naaman, the captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable; because by him the Lord had given deliverance to Syria; he was also a mighty man in valour; but he was a leper.—And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid, and she waited on Naaman's wife.—And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria; for he would recover him of his leprosy! - - - - 217

SERMON

CONTENTS.

Page

SERMON XV.

2 KINGS v. 16—17.

And his servants came near, and spake unto him and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith unto thee, wash and be clean?—Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.—And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him: and he said: Behold, now I know, that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. But he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused.—And Naaman said, Shall there not, then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules burden of earth?—For thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice, unto any other God, but unto the Lord - - - - 233

SERMON

CONTENTS.

Page

SERMON XVI.

2 KINGS v. 18, 19.

In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon; when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.—And he said unto him, Go in peace - - 247

SERMON XVII.

2 KINGS v. 20—27.

But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold my master hath spared Naaman the Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.—So Gehazi followed after Naaman: And when Naaman saw him running after him, he alighted down from his chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well?—And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young

Page

young men of the sons of the prophets; give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.—And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants, and they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house, and he let the men go, and they departed.—But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither.—And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is this a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants?—The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow - - - - 265

CONTENTS.

Page

SERMON XVIII.

2 PETER iii. 5.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up - - - 279

SERMON XIX.

2 TIM. i. 10.

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel - - - - 295

SERMON XX.

MATT. xi. 4, 5.

Jesus answered and said unto them, Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are

CONTENTS.

Page

SERMON LIV.

PHILIP. ii. 8, 9.

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name - - - - 157

SERMON LV.

ON ASH-WEDNESDAY.

AMOS iii. 6.

Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? - - - 169

SERMON LVI.

2 TIM. iii. 16.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God 189

SERMON LVII.

2 TIM. iii. 16.

—— *And is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may*

Page

be thoroughly furnished for every good work - - - - 205

SERMON LVIII.

PROV. xxii. 6.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it - - - - 217

SERMON LIX.

ACTS ii. 37.

When they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? - - 239

SERMON LX.

MICAH vi. 8.

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? - - 255

CONTENTS.

Page

SERMON LXI.

ON WHITSUNDAY.

ISAIAH xliv. 3.

I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed - - 273

SERMON LXII.

MATTH. vi. 24.

——*Ye cannot serve God and mammon* - 289

SERMON LXIII.

PROV. xviii. 14.

The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear? - - - - 301

SERMON LXIV.

DEUT. xxx. 19.

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore chuse life, that both thou and thy seed may live - - - 315

SERMON

CONTENTS.

SERMON LXV.

Preached at Finchley, May 19, 1793, in Consequence of His MAJESTY'S LETTER in Favor of the EMIGRANT CLERGY of FRANCE.

MATT. vii. 12.

Page

Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets - - 331

SERMON

Page

raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them - - - 323

SERMON XXI.

2 SAM. i. 23.

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided - - - 345

SERMON I.

GENESIS, Chap. xxiv. Ver. 63.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide.

IT is impossible to view the simplicity of ancient times, as recorded in Scripture, without a mixture of pleasure and surprise. We there see nature in her artless form: we there behold man in his genuine dignity, with the recent impress of his God upon him—such as he came from the hands of his Maker, and such as he certainly was intended always to remain.

But, at the same time, the comparison we cannot help making between those times and our own, will naturally give pain to every considerate mind. When we look back upon what man has been, and consider what he now is, we can scarce forbear crying out, in the language of

the Prophet of old, " how art thou fallen, O " Lucifer, son of the morning!"

And perhaps no part of Scripture affords a more striking contrast between the manners of ancient and present times, than the words now read to you. They describe to you a man of the first rank and eminence in his country, the heir to a very noble fortune, in the prime and vigour of life, surrounded with every apparent blessing. You would therefore naturally expect, according to the present system of manners, to find him amidst the gay scenes of pleasure and dissipation, surrounded with companions of the midnight revel or devouring dice. But the wise son of Abraham had better learned the value of life and the blessings he enjoyed. He knew, that they were too precious to be squandered away in thoughtless folly or sinful enjoyment. He was unwilling to buy repentance at so great a price. Nature and innocence had to him superior charms. He therefore went out into the fields to meditate at the eventide.

And there would he find sufficient scope for his meditation. The great volume of nature was before him, with all its beauties and wonders. The sun, declining in blazing majesty, and hasting to enlighten other worlds; the flowers of

the field, arrayed in all their various glories; the gradual approach of still evening and solemn darkness; the pale moon and starry host of heaven, in the serenity of an eastern climate, would all have their several charms for a contemplative mind; would all teach him to look up from nature to that great God of nature, by whom they were formed in "number, weight and "measure."

He had also other subjects for his solitary meditation. The recent death of an affectionate mother, and the approaching dissolution of a venerable father, would naturally call forth, in a disposition like his, every tender and affecting thought; would remind him of the shortness of human life, and of the necessity of summoning every faculty to the discharge of his duty, whilst youth and vigour yet enabled him to perform it. The prospect of his approaching marriage also, however pleasing it might be, would somewhat contribute to the seriousness of his disposition, when rightly weighed. "I am now "entering," would he say, "upon all the cares "and concerns of life. Those kind parents, by "whose friendly hand I have hitherto been fos-"tered, by whose wise precepts I have been "formed and guided, like yonder declining "sun, have now run their race of glory, and are

" gone to enjoy the rewards of their piety in a
" better world. I am now to follow their steps.
" I am now to act as becomes the son of Abra-
" ham, the friend of GOD, the Father of the
" faithful. But what an arduous task is this,
" and how unequal do I find myself to the ac-
" complishment of it! I am now going like-
" wise to enter upon that state, which, though
" it increases the happiness of life, yet also
" multiplies its cares. I am to support the aw-
" ful characters of a master, husband, father.
" I am to answer for my own conduct; and I
" am also to watch over the conduct of others,
" in all these untried scenes and relations of
" life. It will become me, therefore, well to
" weigh and examine the duties I am going to
" undertake: it will become me to guard and
" fortify my soul by serious meditation, to
" which this solemn stillness of approaching
" night invites me."

Such might probably be the subjects of Isaac's meditation. And would to God we could all of us be persuaded to imitate his wise and instructive example! But the misfortune is, we are generally either triflers, and do not consider at all, or we are so much engaged in other matters, that we have not time to consider what ought to be the principal object of our concern:

many

many live as it were extempore, and without any thought beyond the news of the day, the flutter of dress and diversions, or the subject of a play or a novel: the rest are the unwearied slaves of business, pride, or ambition. And from these causes arises the greatest part of that multifarious wickedness, which so much predominates in the world: for it is impossible that any man should be deliberately wicked from day to day, and year to year, who would allow himself time to consider seriously, that there is a GOD above and a life to come, that there is a heaven and a hell.

It cannot therefore but be of the greatest importance to every man to imitate the example of Isaac; to stand still and consider what he is, and what he should be; to pry into the secret springs and motives of his actions; to examine the secret tendencies and inclinations of his heart; to fortify his soul by serious meditation; before "the night cometh when no man can "work."

And indeed, what is there that so well deserves our regard and attention, as the faculty of consideration? It is this, by which man is discriminated from the brute of the field. It is this, by which he can look up to the noblest of

all objects, the God that made him. It is this, by which we can pervade the boundless regions of space, or look forward into the regions of eternity. It is this also, by which we can look into our own breasts and actions. The man, therefore, who does not consider, knows not the value of this distinguishing faculty; knows not the highest privilege and dignity of his own nature.

And again, if we consider the various uses and advantages of meditation, what is there so valuable and important to man?

It was the just observation of a great man, when he retired from his military employments, that there ought always to be some time for recollection, between the life of a general and his death. And the same observation will hold true with regard to every other employment. We all know that a life of bustle and constant engagements in the world is a life of danger. Tossed as it were on the ocean, and driven about by the conflicting elements, we live in a state of agitation and confusion: we are delivered over from toil to toil, or from dissipation to dissipation, without power to stand still, to examine and consider. Now, this danger is diminished by frequent meditation. It sets the world and its views at a distance from us. It gives

gives us time to reflect where we are, and what we are. The still eventide of reflection drives out of our minds the cares and concerns of the day: the calm solitude of the field chases away from our thoughts the tumults and projects of the crowded haunts of men. Our passions too have then time to cool, and to view things in their proper colours. The rage of ambition will subside, when reflection shews us the emptiness of earthly honours. The fire of lust will burn with less violence, when reason has time to tell us, that remorse and shame are its inseparable companions. The stings of animosity and revenge will operate less forcibly, when we will give ourselves leave to remember, that friends and foes will soon lie down together in the dust. The arrows of affliction will give us less pain, when meditation informs us that they are but for a moment, and cannot follow us to that better country, where all tears are wiped away from all faces.

It is another advantage of meditation, that it teaches us that best of all knowledge, which therefore the ancients supposed came down from heaven, I mean the knowledge of ourselves. In the language of the Psalmist, to "commune "with our own hearts," to pry into its secret springs and motives of action, to examine its

favourite tendencies and propensities, may be no pleasing task, but certainly is a very necessary and profitable one. It will teach us, where the first assault of temptation is likely to be made, and therefore, where we ought most to be on our guard. It will shew us the variety of our own imperfections, and therefore teach us to be humble and forgiving to others. It will point out to us the uncertainty of every earthly advantage, and therefore will incline us to extend that charity to the distressed, of which we ourselves may one day stand in need. And lastly, it will teach us the just value of our life itself, which alone carries with it more instructive lessons of morality than all the eloquence of ancient sages and learned philosophers.

But the greatest advantage of meditation is, that it will bring us acquainted with God. "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at "peace," is the language of holy writ; and certain it is, that till we are acquainted with him, there can be no true peace. It is therefore an inestimable advantage of meditation, that it is the means of bringing about this acquaintance.—It gives us the opportunity of considering his glorious being and perfections; which will imprint an awful reverence of his majesty

majesty on our minds.—It acquaints us with his all-seeing care and universal presence; which will confirm our reliance on his providence.—It teaches us, that he is the Father of the friendless and distressed; which will embolden us to approach his throne, pour out our griefs before him, and make known our wants.—It informs us, that nothing happens in heaven or in earth without his direction or permission; and therefore will instruct us to look up with comfort to him, on all occasions; as knowing that both we and our's are safe under the shadow of his wings, so long as we endeavour to deserve his favour and protection. And can there be a greater consolation than this, to a frail and helpless being like man;—to know that he is always under the care of an Almighty Governor, who sees all his wants, and whose perfections are hourly employed for his welfare and support? Surely, therefore, it is every man's interest, as well as his duty, to make himself acquainted with this glorious being, and to meditate day and night on all his wonderous works; that when all the vain friendships of the world shall fail, and the world itself be dissolved, he may have an "anchor of the soul, sure and "stedfast."

These

These are some of the advantages of meditation. Many others, I dare say, your own understanding, and, I hope, your own experience, will suggest to you. Give me leave however to mention two or three cautions, which may be of use to those, who wish to reap these or any other advantages from religious meditation.

The first is, that this meditation must not be superficial or irregular. Many are apt to fancy that they practise this duty, if they now and then make a few reflections, at some hour of seriousness or mortification, when they are out of humour with the world, or incapable of relishing its pleasures. I would not willingly discourage even the smallest dawnings of piety. But, I am afraid, these irregular and temporary starts of meditation are of little use. They are only what the Apostle calls "looking in a glass, "and straitway forgetting what manner of men "we are." But the truth is, it is the duty of a Christian to meditate and consider at all times: every night should account to God and his conscience for the follies of the day; since none of us can tell, whether we may live to do it to-morrow.

Secondly, this consideration or meditation must be universal: it must extend to all our sins

sins and follies, to all parts of our duty to God and man, and to all the branches of our holy Religion. It is the fault, I fear, of too many, to satisfy themselves with repenting of some sins, though they still retain one favourite vice or darling lust. Others again endeavour to improve the fervour of their faith and devotion by frequently meditating on what Christ has done for them, but do not care to remember what they are to do for themselves. And I think I may, without any violation of Christian candour, say, that this species of delusion has been too much encouraged by those ignorant teachers, who, by laying an undue stress upon the efficacy of faith, have led many of their followers to suppose that Christ has done so much for them, that they need do nothing for themselves. But the true religion of Christ will teach us, to extend our thoughts and practice to all those great moral duties, which necessarily spring out of a true faith; and whilst we gratefully acknowledge and meditate upon the great things which Christ has done for us, to remember that there are also great things, which we are to do for ourselves.

Thirdly, as our meditations, on the one hand, ought not to be cold and languid, so they ought to be carefully guarded against visionary flights and

and enthusiastic fervours on the other. Meditation, when it is the child of genuine devotion, and under the guidance of a sober mind, is one of the noblest employments of human nature. But if it be suffered to run out into all the extravagancies of a heated imagination, if it blow men up with an idea of their own singular importance, if it fill their minds with ungrounded notions of secret illapses and particular illuminations of the Divine Spirit, if it lead them to despise human ordinances as unprofitable or unnecessary, if it tend to withdraw men from the world, or from a discharge of the proper duties of life,—it then becomes dangerous and ridiculous, and rather deserves our contempt than our admiration.

For examples of this mistaken piety, and of its bad consequences, I am sorry to say, we need not look far. We all of us know to what lengths the church of Rome has carried the notion of a spiritual retreat from the world, so as to fill every part of the papal dominions with lazy or vicious ascetics, to the great hurt of society and scandal of religion. And our own times will furnish us with a melancholy instance of the power of a misguided devotion, in those numerous sectaries around us, who, whilst they fancy themselves actuated by superior zeal for God,

God, and a higher degree of spiritual illumination, see not that they are acting in open defiance of the laws of their country, are incurring the heavy guilt of unnecessarily dividing the unity of the church, are breaking down the fences of ecclesiastical order and authority, are invading the property and province of the lawful pastors of the church, are setting themselves up as guides and teachers, amid their temerarious followers, without authority, without ability, and without cause.

But let not their abuse of this duty discourage us from endeavouring to reap the advantages of it, which are so great and many.

Wouldst thou then enjoy real and lasting happiness, seek it not in crowds and tumults, amidst the giddy train of lawless riot or thoughtless dissipation:—genuine happiness ever loves solitude, reflection and retirement, and therefore dwells not there. It is only to be found with Isaac in the fields at eventide, in the still hour of meditation, when the passions are calm and undisturbed, when the cares and competitions of the world are banished, when the clamour of interest is silenced, and the still small voice of reason can be heard. Thither then direct thy steps in pursuit of so inestimable a treasure. Set the world

world from before thee, with all its cares and pleasures. Consider what thou art, and what thou oughtest to be. Weigh well thy past actions, and mark with a cautious eye thy various failures and deviations from the great line of God's law, and from thence learn caution and humility. Look forward also into the various snares and temptations which furround thee, lest innocence should fall a prey to surprize and incogitancy. Art thou in danger of falling into any sin, stop a moment, and ask thyself this question: What am I going to do? Life is short, and death is certain: Will then the momentary enjoyment I promise myself from the commission of this sin compensate for the loss of innocence and reputation, the favour of God, and the hopes of eternal happiness? Where is the lust, where is the pleasure that can stand such a question as this? But, if this be not a sufficient fence against the power of temptation, anticipate in thought that awful moment, when death shall put a period to all thy hopes and joys. Sober and impartial reason will direct thee to think thus with thyself:—I had once a father, who has now paid the last debt of nature. I myself am made of the same frail materials, and therefore, like him, must soon lie down upon the bed of mortality. And when that awful moment shall approach, when the stores of medicine

medicine are unable to relieve my afflicted body, when my weeping friends have taken their final adieu, and the awful prospect of eternity is before me; what will then be my opinion of all the pleasures and temptations, which now so strongly allure and captivate my soul? Will wealth or title speak comfort to my soul? Will guilty pleasures support my sinking spirits? Will the song of riot accord with dying groans? Why then should I now embitter my dying moments by doing that, which, for one short moment of pleasure, will entail upon me an eternity of pain?

Every man is sensible of the force of these questions, when he is awaked to reason by the pressure of calamity, or is alarmed by the fear of death. He must be insensible to the best impressions of nature, who has not felt the force of them, at some period of his life. But the grand misfortune is, that men will not suffer just and serious thoughts to enter frequently, or at least to continue long in their minds. They fly to dissipation and riot, to the worst of company and the greatest of misery, to avoid that sober reflection, which would ensure to them peace and happiness. For surely, if happiness is to be had on this side the grave, he bids the fairest for it, who, by meditation, prepares himself for all events.

events. He has weighed the storms and dangers of life, and therefore fears them not. He has seen the fallacious sunshine and smiles of fortune, and therefore is guarded against their treacherous allurements. Under oppression, reproach, or misery, he has considered what man can do, and therefore dreads not him whose greatest power is, that he can kill the body. He has anticipated, by meditation, the various forms and approaches of the great King of terrors, and therefore shrinks not at his uplifted arm. In all things he is instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need; having learned, in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content.

Keep then in view, by frequent meditation, the great business and end of life. Your happiness and your virtue depend upon it. It will secure to you peace, amidst the changes and chances of the present world, as far as peace can belong to man. And when death shall summon you to prepare for another, it will save you the hazard of trusting the review of a whole life to a few hours, at a time when you are least fit for such a task, or of being cut off in a moment, without the power or ability to undertake it.

May therefore the Holy Spirit of God so direct your ways in the discharge of this duty, that the meditations of your hearts may always be acceptable in the sight of God, who is your only strength and your Redeemer!

SERMON II.

1 THESSALONIANS v. 23.

The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

IT has been justly remarked by two writers of distinguished eminence*, that the eloquence of St. Paul bears a striking resemblance to that of Demosthenes, the greatest of all the antient orators. I think, however, that though they both agree in sublimity of sentiment and energy of expression;—though they † alike arise from earth to heaven, in all the resistless majesty of unbounded imagination;—yet, where the tender passions are concerned, where the heart is to be

* Vide Smith's Longinus. Blackw. Sacred Classics, Vol. I. page 299.

† Vide Blackw. page 301.

touched, as well as the understanding convinced, the Christian orator has infinitely the advantage over the Athenian. There is a strain of melting affection, there is a flow of winning and pathetic earnestness, which runs through all his writings, which it is impossible to read without the most lively emotions of tenderness and sensibility. It would be needless, it would be endless, to give all the examples of this. Let any man only read his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, and if it has not the same effect upon him, which it had upon St. Paul's audience, who all wept sore and fell upon his neck and kissed him, he must have a heart incapable of the finer feelings of nature, a stranger to the amiable ebullitions of human sensibility.

There is something no less solemn and affecting in this prayer of St. Paul for the Thessalonians, contained in the text; expressive both of his own love and affection for them, and also of that great earnestness and sincerity, with which he laboured to promote the salvation of souls.

And the devout fervency, with which he offers it up to heaven, will appear in a still more forcible and amiable light, if we consider the peculiar circumstances of the Thessalonians, to whom he writes.

Thessalonica, or, as it is now called, Salonica, was at that time the capital of Macedon. The greater part of its inhabitants were not only heathen idolaters, but also men of dissolute and abandoned lives; the rest were Jews, exceedingly jealous of the traditions and superstitions of their fathers. It might naturally therefore be concluded, that both would be very averse to a religion, which struck at all the wickedness of the one, and all the superstitious rites and ceremonies of the other. Accordingly we find*, that St. Paul had not preached the Gospel there more than three weeks, before a tumult was raised against him, and compelled him to fly to Berea. It was no wonder therefore he should express the most tender concern for the infant colony of Christians he had left behind him. He knew they were as sheep without a shepherd, in the midst of ravenous wolves, who would not fail to distress them by every art of barbarity and persecution; and therefore they stood in need of every advantage, both of celestial aid and human consolation, to guard them from apostacy, and to keep them blameless to the coming of their great Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. He therefore lifts up his hands and voice to heaven in their favour, with all the fervency of a parent, anxious

* Acts, Chap. xvii.

for the welfare of a beloved child, exposed to the attacks of an enraged and unrelenting enemy: "the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; "and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul "and body, be preserved blameless, unto the "coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

But it is not in this light only, that these words deserve our attention and admiration: they contain also a description of every Christian's moral duty, highly deserving our most serious consideration. For though we may not be able to reach the standard of perfection laid down by St. Paul, yet it will become us never to lose sight of it, but rather, on all occasions, to remember, that it is our duty to endeavour at least, "that our whole spirit and soul and body "may be preserved blameless to the coming of "Christ."

When St. Paul here speaks of spirit and soul and body, it seems pretty clear, that he speaks the language of the antient philosophers, who distinguished between spirit and soul, and therefore represented man as a three-fold composition. By spirit they understood that principle of knowledge and reason, that noble intellectual faculty, which distinguisheth man from brutes, by which

we

we are capable of reflecting, judging, reasoning, and determining; that celestial emanation of divinity, which makes us bear the image of God, who is a spirit. By soul they understood that animal principle of life and motion, which is in some sort common to man with brutes, and which is the fountain of all our sensual appetites and inclinations.

However, without entering into the propriety of this distinction*, it is sufficiently clear, that St. Paul means by these words, the whole and entire man, with all his faculties and operations. The first rule therefore deducible from them is, that a Christian's integrity must be universal, must extend to every faculty of his soul and body, all of which must be preserved blameless, as far as human infirmity will permit.

It will not therefore be sufficient for us to change one part only, to have some good thoughts, to resist some passions, to abstain from some sins, or to perform some good actions. No: the whole life of a Christian, the whole entire man, with all his faculties, thoughts, inclinations, and judgments, his whole spirit, soul, and body, must be devoted to the service

* Vide Le Clerc, Whitby, &c.

of God and man, or else he cannot be preserved blameless.

The second part of this prayer of St. Paul for the Thessalonians is, that they may be preserved blameless before God.

A prayer truly important and interesting! For we may appear blameless before men; we may do our alms before men; we may seem unto men to fast; the uplifted eye or bended knee may have the semblance of devotion; in short, we may appear outwardly to be fair and virtuous, and yet within, like whited sepulchres, be full of rottenness and all uncleanness. But we should remember, that God seeth not as man seeth. The eye of mortality discerns not beyond the surface of things; but the eye of Omnipotence pierceth the very reins and heart. If therefore we would reach St. Paul's idea of Christian perfection, we must lay aside the mask of hypocrisy, we must strip off every disguise, and walk before God in sincerity and truth, without which we cannot be blameless before him.

Thirdly, our holiness must be attended with constancy and perseverance. This is St. Paul's meaning, when he prays "that the Thessalo-" nians may be preserved blameless before God,

" unto

" unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." For it is not enough to start in the Christian race, unless we also persevere in it to the end. We may remember, that our Saviour's language is, " blessed is that servant, whom his lord, " when he cometh, shall find so doing." And assuredly those, and those only, will be blessed, whose days are crowned with a firm and unshaken piety, and whose virtue ends not but with their lives. A consideration highly deserving the attention of those who have been trained in their early years in the ways of virtue and piety, but in a more advanced age, fall into divers lusts and temptations, which draw them from their duty, and will, in the end, drown them in eternal perdition: for as the prophet said of old, even so it is also now: " when the " righteous man turneth away from his righte- " ousness, and committeth iniquity, and doth " according to all the abominations that the " wicked man doth, shall he live? No: all his " righteousness that he hath done shall not be " mentioned; in his trespass that he hath tres- " passed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, " in them shall he die." Such then is St. Paul's idea of Christian perfection: it must extend to the whole spirit, soul, and body; it must be blameless in the sight of God; and lastly, it must

must continue to the last moment of our lives, "to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

If such then be the importance of Christian holiness, we shall naturally be led to inquire, how it is to be obtained? The same Apostle will tell us. For when he prays, that God would wholly sanctify the Thessalonians, he plainly points him out to us, as the author of that sanctification, which we are commanded to seek for by earnest prayer.

And various are the means, which God makes use of for this purpose. For, strictly speaking, every act of his providence, whether tending to promote our happiness or increase our misery, is an instrument in his hands to bring us to holiness. The principal, however, and more immediate instruments for this purpose, are his word and the Holy Spirit.

By his word, he enlightens our minds, lays before us the most prevailing arguments, gives us the most salutary instructions, points out the most engaging examples, to lead and allure us to the practice of holiness: the word is therefore justly, on this account, called in scripture, the power of God unto salvation, and an incorruptible seed.

But

But we are not to suppose, that God has done all he designs to do for us, when he causes the word of God to be preached among us, and the seed of the Gospel to be sown in our hearts. The scriptures farther teach us, that he not only acts outwardly upon us, by the preaching of the word, but also inwardly in our hearts, by the power of his Spirit. This is what St. Luke means, when he tells us, "that the Lord opened "the heart of Lydia, so that she attended unto "the things which were spoken by Paul." This is also what the writer to the Hebrews means, when, in his prayer for them, he says, "the God of peace make you perfect in every "good work to do his will, working in you "that which is well-pleasing in his sight." And St. Paul says, in the text, to the same purpose, "the very God of peace sanctify you wholly." All which expressions clearly suppose, that all is not done when the word is preached, but that still it remains for God, by his Holy Spirit, to give life to the seed sown, and make it bring forth fruit, some sixty fold, and some an hundred fold.

There are indeed some men, who, from the ridiculous notions which fanatics and enthusiasts have too often given of the operations of the Holy Spirit of God, have been unhappily led to deny

deny altogether its influence on the human mind. But surely that Almighty Being, who holds the hearts of all men in his hands, can act as powerfully upon our minds, to raise in us holy thoughts and pious resolutions, as he does upon our bodies, to produce those various perceptions and sensations, which we daily experience. He who can stop the perturbed waves of the sea, and say to the storm, "peace, be still," can also fix a wandering mind, and govern an unruly imagination: he can prevent the effects of prejudice and passion, he can disarm our malice, awaken our slumbering conscience, bend our stubborn will, melt our steeled hearts, fill us with compunction and remorse, and draw us to himself by the tender cords of love and duty.

And indeed this has not only been the constant doctrine both of the Jewish and Christian church, founded on the clear testimony of Scripture, but also, every man who rightly weighs the frailty and corruption of his own nature, who recollects the frequent and pathetic lamentations of Socrates and others of the best heathens, who felt the feebleness and insufficiency of the guidance of unassisted reason, will want no other argument to convince him of the necessity of some farther aid, to carry him through the compass of his duty; and therefore will thank-

thankfully accept that which is offered, though he knows neither the modes nor measures of its operations. He will bless the hand that supports his weakness, though he sees it not; he will adore the God that preserves him, though, like Job, he cannot find him but in his effects: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; "and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on "the left hand, where he doth work, but I can- "not behold him; he hideth himself on the "right hand, that I cannot see him:" and yet "the pillars of heaven tremble, and are asto- "nished at his reproof."

And indeed this divine assistance is not only necessary, in the beginning of life, to lead us to God, but also to guide and conduct us to the end of our spiritual warfare. For look round you in the world, and recollect the many fatal examples of men, who once did run well, who have appeared with honour and reputation for a time, but, for want of divine grace to strengthen them, have fallen into the most destructive sins.

There, for example, lies a hapless youth, whose morning of life promised a long continuance of blessings, to reward the watchful care of an affectionate parent: but, too soon deserted by the grace of God, he gave way to destruc-

destructive passions, and fell a sacrifice to those false notions of honour, which too often bring down the grey head with sorrow to the grave.

See another, once happy in every circumstance of life! An affectionate wife shared with him the joys of innocence and virtue, and a group of innocents looked up to him for guidance and support: but, in an unhappy hour, giving way to the fatal phrenzy of gaming, he involved himself and his family in distress and shame, and to shun the censure of the world, and the stings of his own conscience, he terminated his life by suicide. Whilst he lived, he nourished in his breast the worm that never dieth, and too soon, it is to be feared, he plunged headlong into the fire that cannot be quenched.

See a third, whose earlier days integrity and industry had crowned with success and respect! The way was open for him to that higher degree of opulence and esteem, which seldom fails to reward perseverance and probity. But alas! a disposition to convivial merriment soon produced in him a fatal attachment to drunkenness: in proportion as this increased, the springs of industry were slackened, his credit and success declined in the world, and he now exists, I will not say lives, like an oak blasted by the light-

lightning from heaven, a monument of divine vengeance, and a warning to others of the danger of quenching the spirit of God.

Who can withhold the tribute of sorrow, when he calls to mind another well known example of the fatal dereliction of divine grace, in a person once of distinguished eminence in the sacred order. A man, on whom heaven had bestowed all her united accomplishments: a person to command affection and respect: the voice of eloquence to enforce and adorn the precepts of divine wisdom: yet, captivated by the false glitter of idle shew and unprofitable parade, regardless of those divine precepts he once so well taught, after having passed the meridian of life, when prudence generally stands as a cautious guard over the passions, he was tempted to commit a crime never to be forgiven in a commercial country, and therefore fell a sacrifice to the vindiction of the law, as a sad warning to posterity, that no talents, however captivating and resplendent, can ward off ruin and infamy, without the assistance of divine grace. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he "standeth, take heed lest he fall."

You see then, how necessary a continuance of divine grace is, and therefore, how wisely St. Paul

Paul prayed, that the God of peace would preserve the Thessalonians blameless to the end, or, as he expresses himself in another place, "that he, which had begun a good work in "them, would perform it until the day of "Jesus Christ."

Since God then is the giver of every good gift, let us all, like St. Paul, daily offer up our humble and earnest prayers to him, that he would put into our minds good desires, that he would protect us from all error, and would lead us into all truth; and that he will give us such a measure of holiness, as may entitle us, through the merits of his Son, to his favour and protection.

There are, indeed, other means of improving in holiness, which we may use with advantage: but, without this of prayer, all others will be vain and fruitless. We may profit, by reading the word of God, or by the perusal of books of piety, with which our language abounds in a more eminent degree, perhaps, than any other. We may profit too, by hearing the instructions of the ministers of the Gospel. But we should ever remember, that the sublimest books of devotion, nay even the book of God himself, can be no further useful, than as they lead us to the practice

practice of devotion and piety. We should remember too, that the ministers of God, "though "they could speak with the tongue of men and "angels," unless they lead us to devotion, are no better to us, than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

But no man ever practised the duty of constant and fervent prayer, without finding the advantage of it, in every part and stage of life. It is our shield in the hour of temptation, it is our comfort in the hour of distress, it is our joy in prosperity, it is our support against despair; and when all our earthly hopes and fears begin to vanish, when we lie down on that bed of sickness and mortality from which we shall never rise, it will be our best support against the horrors of dissolution and the agonies of death.

Let us then daily, both in public and private, fall down on our knees before the footstool of God. And may God so graciously accept the imperfect prayers we offer to him, that when we shall stand together in judgment at his throne, they may plead for us, and that our "whole "spirit and soul and body may be preserved "blameless," at that great and awful hour!

SERMON III.

GENESIS xxii. 1, 2.

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham. And he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains, which I will tell thee of.

THE pages of prophane history record many instances of heroic fortitude and resolution, which justly challenge our profoundest admiration and esteem. When, for example, we see a Brutus or a Manlius Torquatus, rising up from the seat of judgment, to pronounce the sentence of death upon their own children, and with firm and unaltered looks, beholding their bodies mangled by the bloody axe of the executioner,

—we cannot forbear admiring the determined severity of that virtue, which could prefer the dictates of duty to the feelings of natural affection, and which thus enabled the uprightness of the *judge* to triumph over the tenderness of the *parent*. But, allowing to these examples their due share of merit and commendation, there is still something much more affecting, much more deserving of admiration, in the conduct of Abraham, now before us. It required, indeed, no *small* degree of fortitude in the Roman fathers, to stifle the strong pleadings of nature in favour of their offending sons: but, at the same time, it must be remembered, that those fathers had been educated with the most ardent and enthusiastic notions of the love of their country, and therefore were ready to sacrifice every thing to it; and that their sons had been guilty of high misdemeanors, which justice, which the safety of their country, and the support of military discipline, loudly required to be punished with exemplary severity.

But, in the history before us, the circumstances are widely different. The child to be sacrificed was an only son, was the son of his father's old age, and, what was above all, was a dutiful and unoffending child, who had never transgressed his father's command, at any time.

The

The father too, was not only to be present at the execution, but himself was to be the executioner,—was himself to plunge the bloody knife into the heart of the young and unoffending victim. Nor was the sentence to be executed in a short moment, whilst the command of God still sounded in his ears;—but three whole days intervened, before he reached the place destined for the bloody scene. A long and melancholy interval of suspence indeed! which must have planted a thousand daggers in the heart of any parent but that of Abraham! But see the wonderful power of religion, where a just sense of the divine Majesty is firmly rooted! He hastes, without a murmur, to the land of Moriah,—he binds the youthful victim upon the altar, without a tear,—he lifts up his knife, without repining, to slay that very son, who was the promised seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed!

Before I proceed to the farther consideration of this pathetic story, I think it necessary to remark some expressions made use of by the divine historian, in his account of it.

The first thing observable is the word tempt: Moses says, that "God did tempt Abraham." By which we are not to understand, that God

intended to lead him on to commit a wicked action: for God can neither be tempted with evil himself, neither tempteth he any man to evil: but rather, that he placed him in circumstances, where duty and natural affection seemed to draw him different ways; that, by a ready submission of his own will to the will of God, in the most trying moment of his life, he might approve the stedfastness of his own faith, and set an illustrious example of obedience, to all succeeding generations. When again, the historian introduces God, as saying, "Now I "know that thou fearest God;" we are not to understand, that God was ignorant of it before: for he knoweth all things, past, present, and to come, and understandeth even our thoughts, long before: but rather, that he intends, by that expression, to declare his full assurance and approbation of Abraham's obedience: "I approve "of thy conduct, and submission to my dic- "tates, of which thou hast now given so signal "a proof." When again, Abraham, at the foot of the mountain, tells his servants, that "he and the lad would go and worship, and "come again to them," we are not to accuse the venerable Patriarch of deceiving them by a falsehood, in saying, that both of them would return together. For though it was certainly his full resolution to sacrifice the child, in obedience

dience to God's command, yet he was no less fully persuaded, that God would raise him to life again, and that he would return with him. He knew, that from him the Messiah was to descend; he knew, that God would never, by any subsequent order, contradict what he had before so solemnly promised: he therefore could have no doubt that God would, in some way or other, restore that life, which, by his order, he was then hastening to take from him; or, as the Epistle to the Hebrews expresses it*, "ac-"counting that God was able to raise him up "even from the dead; from whence also he "originally received him in a figure;" that is, under circumstances equally hopeless, considering his own advanced age, and the deadness of Sarah's womb. I think there can be no doubt, that this sacrifice of Isaac was a type of a much greater sacrifice; that of the Son of God, who was offered up on Mount Calvary, for our redemption; and nailed to the cross, a victim of obedience to the commands of his Father. It has therefore been admitted as such, by Christians of all ages, from a just consideration of the exact correspondence, not only in the essential parts, but even in the minutest particulars, between the two persons. The births of both were

* Heb. xi. 19.

miraculous, and foretold by a messenger from heaven; they were both only sons: the names of both of them were appointed by a divine designation: they were both of them, by God's command, offered up in sacrifice; the one figuratively, the other in reality, as a completion of the prefigured sacrifice. Isaac was figuratively dead for the space of three days; that is, from the time of God's command to slay him, to the time of his being bound on the altar, and Christ lay dead three days, in the bowels of the earth: they were both restored again to life: Isaac carries the wood, on which he was to be sacrificed, and Jesus was compelled to bear the cross, on which he was to die. So that, amidst such a glaring multiplicity of correspondent circumstances, it would be the height of madness to deny, that God intended the sacrifice of Isaac as a type of the future sacrifice of the Messiah, who was to spring from his family. It is not, however, in this view, that I mean to recommend this history to your consideration: I shall not, therefore, enter into a detail of many more particulars, which, if it were necessary, might be brought to support the correspondence between the typical death of the son of Abraham and the real death of our great deliverer, the Son of God.

Should

Should any question the right of Abraham to sacrifice his son, as being an act clearly contrary to the established law of reason and nature; I answer, that the command of God was a sufficient warrant for his doing it. He knew, that the same God who gave, had a right to take away; and that as he had, contrary to the ordinary course of things, made him the author of his being, so also he had a right to make him the instrument of his destruction; and that, therefore, it was his duty to submit to the divine will, in this hard trial, though he knew neither the reasons nor the end of it. Had there, indeed, been any ground to doubt of its being the command of God, it would have been highly culpable in Abraham, to prefer a doubtful order of heaven to the clear law of nature, imprinted on his breast by the finger of God. But Abraham was too well acquainted with the nature of divine revelations, to have any doubt in this. His long experience of supernatural operations, and his frequent intercourse with God, added to a calm temper and well grounded faith, made him little likely to be imposed upon, by enthusiastic ardors or diabolical illusions. It is plain too, that the very precise mountain, in the land of Moriah, was pointed out to him, by some supernatural power, as a clear corroboration of the voice from heaven, which commanded him to slay

slay his son. Having therefore no doubt that he, who is the lord of life and death, had called him to be the executioner of his son, he knew, that it was his indispensable duty to obey the order, however hard or contrary it might seem to flesh and blood.

The case, therefore, seems sufficiently clear, with regard to the lawfulness of Abraham's sacrificing his child. But what shall we say to another act of parricide, recorded in our bibles, which admits of no such justification, and therefore must fill every breast with horror; I mean that of Jephthah's offering up his daughter, for a burnt-offering, in consequence of a rash vow made by him, in his war with the children of Ammon? Is it possible to conceive that a man, and that not a wild barbarian, should so far forget the dictates of justice and humanity, as to offer up an innocent and virtuous maid? Is it possible to conceive, that a parent should be so deaf to every feeling of nature, as to devote to the flames a child, an only child, a dutiful and unoffending child, the object of his present joy and future hope? Is it possible to conceive, that a leader of Israel *, "upon whom the Spirit of "the Lord was," and who is † enumerated

* Judges xi. 29. † Heb. xi. 32.

among

among the most pious heroes of the Old Testament, should act so directly contrary to the will of God, as to offer up his child in sacrifice to him, though he knew that human victims were an abomination to him? Forbid it reason, forbid it humanity, forbid it every principle of nature and of piety!

But how then, it will be asked, shall we remove the crime, so expressly imputed to him, in the language of our bibles? I answer, by a very obvious and simple change in the translation, perfectly agreeable to the strictest laws of criticism, and still more agreeable to the genuine laws of reason and humanity. The vow of Jephthah, according to the present translation, is this: "If thou shalt without fail deliver the "children of Ammon into mine hands, then it "shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the "door of my house to meet me, shall surely be "the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-"offering." Here then is a plain and unchangeable vow of offering up to the Lord, as a burnt-sacrifice, whatever should first meet him, from his house, at his return; which he is accordingly supposed to have executed upon his unfortunate daughter. But if we translate the single particle *, which comes between the two

* *Vau.*

material

material parts of his vow, disjunctively, instead of conjunctively, as it is properly translated in the margin of the Bible, the whole of this bloody imputation will vanish, and a clear and consistent sense will appear in his vow, in these words: "If the Lord will deliver the children of Ammon "into my hands, then it shall be, that whatso- "ever cometh forth of the doors of my house to "meet me, shall surely be the Lord's*, or I "will offer it up for a burnt-offering;" that is, in other words, if it be a man or woman that first meets me, they shall be consecrated to the Lord, and if it be any other creature, I will offer it up for a burnt offering†. And the whole of what follows, so clearly points out a dedication of his daughter to the service of God, according to the custom of those days, rather than the sacrifice of her, as to add the greatest strength to this interpretation. For what can we possibly understand by her bewailing her virginity upon the mountains, for two months before the execution of the vow, and by the expression, after the execution of the vow, "that she knew no "man," but that she spent her life in the service of God, as one of those virgin-priestesses, so frequently mentioned in ancient writers.

* It is so translated in the margin of the Bible, and also in Gen. ii. 6. Exod. i. 10. Deut. xxvii. 9. Isa. vii. 6. &c.

† Witness the Nazarenes, Samuel, &c.

Should

Should it be asked, Why then doth Jephthah express so deep a sorrow at his daughter's coming out to meet him? I answer, that, even according to this interpretation of his vow, he had still great and sufficient cause for sorrow. Every man has naturally a desire to see his name continued in a flourishing posterity. The Jews, in particular, had this desire; both because the want of issue was a curse and reproach amongst them, and also, because every one of them entertained the vain, but flattering idea that the promised Messiah should spring from his seed. When, therefore, the unhappy father saw himself, by an inconsiderate vow, cut off from these pleasing hopes;—when he considered his unoffending child as doomed, by his rashness, to live and die under the reproach of being childless,—we cannot much wonder, that he should rend his cloaths, and cry out, "Alas! my daughter, "thou hast brought me very low." Should it be farther asked, Why then did the daughters of Israel go yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah, four days in a year? I answer for the same reasons, which caused her father's lamentation, that is, her being doomed to an unalterable state of celibacy: which, like him, they might justly consider as a curse and reproach. I must, however, remark further, that the Hebrew word,

word*, which is here translated to lament, signifies also to talk or discourse with: a sense perfectly agreeable to the interpretation now given; as implying, that the companions, who joined with her in bewailing her virginity upon the mountains, went annually, so long as she lived, to visit and console her, in her state of religious dedication to the service of God.

I am not ignorant, that it has generally been imagined, that the story of Iphigenia's sacrifice at Aulis, and the rash vow of Idomeneus, made during his voyage from Troy,—to slay whatever should first meet him, at his return home, are both founded on this history of Jephthah; and therefore may seem to countenance the idea of Jephthah's having sacrificed his daughter. But to this I need only answer,—1st, that it is not clear, that Iphigenia was sacrificed, since many writers tell us, that she was carried away from the altar, by Diana, that is like Jephthah's daughter, devoted to perpetual virginity;—2dly, that if she was sacrificed, it was not by any order of her father, but by the command of Diana, and the craft of Ulysses;—3dly, that the vow of Idomeneus was executed upon a son and not upon a daughter;—and, lastly, that,

* *Thanah:* vide Judges, ch. v. ver. 11. and it is so translated in the margin of the Bible.

even

even if the circumstances of both bore a stronger resemblance than they do to this sacred history, still it would be absurd to draw any conclusions about it, from the obscure fables of pagan and mythologous antiquity.

But it is high time to return from this digression, into which I have been led, from a desire of throwing light upon a part of scripture, which, in its present form, must always appear harsh and unnatural, and highly derogatory from the character of Jephthah, who is expressly ranked, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, with the most faithful and distinguished servants of God, recorded in the Old Testament*.

Having then explained the mystical part of the sacrifice of Isaac, as it typically related to the death of Christ, I shall now proceed to consider the moral and instructive part of it, as applicable to ourselves. And 1st, We may learn, from this history, the true nature of a genuine and approved faith; that it must be grounded on sufficient evidence, and must also shew itself by good works and obedience. There are too many

* See, on this subject, De Lyra, Junius, and Tremellius, Osiander, L. Cappellus de Vot. Jephthæ, Marsham's Can. Ægypt. sect. 9. g. 3. Saubertus de Sacrificiis, c. 21. p. 516. Schedius de Diis German. l. 2. c. 31.

with

with whom every start of imagination, or sudden heat of passion, passes for a divine impulse, and drives them on to break through the fences of reason and good order, under pretence of illuminations from above. There are others who satisfy themselves with a formal and empty belief of the great truths revealed to them from heaven, but take no care to exemplify them in their lives and conduct. Both these would do well to study carefully the example of Abraham, now before us, who neither believed without the strongest evidence, nor, when he had believed, hesitated a single moment, to shew his belief by his obedience; and therefore was justified by his righteousness, and thought worthy of being called, "the friend of God."

2dly, This example of Abraham will furnish us with an experimental proof of the power of religion, and will shew us the great duties of our calling, reduced to practice, by a man of like infirmities with ourselves.

When, indeed, to stir us up to the exercise of those noble virtues, which the Gospel requires of us, the example of our heavenly Father is proposed to us, and we are exhorted to "be fol- "lowers of God as dear children," the greatness of the pattern is apt to terrify us, and to

make us cry out, "Who is sufficient for these "things?" Or again, when we are reminded of the history of our Redeemer, to encourage us to walk as he walked, who left us an example, that we should follow his steps, we are ready to plead the infirmities of our frail nature, against his perfect innocence, who was undefiled and separate from sinners, and to consider him, not as a man like unto us in all things, but as the eternal Word, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

But in Abraham we have a pattern, confessedly within the reach of our imitation; a man; a father; who marks out to us the glorious example of a consummate obedience to the divine laws; who is sensible of the difficulties to which he is called, and the weakness of flesh and blood, yet conquers both, by the power of a lively faith and obedience. What a cloud of objections would some have raised against that voice from heaven, "Take now thy son, thine only son, "and offer him up for a burnt-offering?"—Can such an order as this be agreeable to the preceding promise of God, "I am thy shield, and "thy exceeding great reward?"—Is this then the recompense so often promised; Is the loss of an only son then, the effect of the divine protection? Is it possible, that God should require

a sacrifice so contrary to reason and nature? How many contradictions present themselves, which seem irreconcileable to every received and established human principle? God is good, and reason tells us, that piety ought to be rewarded, by the supreme governor of the world; and Abraham, we know, had not been wanting in his duty or submission: Yet this good God, this just governor, commands a father to lay violent hands on his innocent son, and by a cruel piety, to purchase the favour of heaven, at the expence of the strongest tye of humanity, parental affection.—Again, God had sworn to Abraham, "to multiply his seed as the stars of "heaven," in this very son, and "to establish "his covenant with him for an everlasting cove-"venant:" Yet he commands him to be cut off, in the flower of his youth, when Abraham could have no prospect of a future progeny, to be the staff of his old age, or to inherit the promises of God. Under such circumstances, how naturally would the feelings of a parent suggest, that there must be some error in the heavenly voice; that a God of justice and mercy could never pronounce so severe a decree, or be pleased with the blood of a child, streaming through a parent's hands? But, amidst all these seeming difficulties, Abraham was convinced that God commanded, and therefore he obeyed, without

pretending

pretending either to question or to unravel the decrees of him, whom he knew it was his duty to reverence, "though his ways were past finding out."

He not only obeyed too, but he also obeyed readily. "He rose up early in the morning," he instantly performed every necessary office himself, to expedite the execution of the divine order, he saddled his ass, he clave the wood for a burnt-offering, and went to the place which God had told him.

With what cheerfulness also and serenity does he obey the divine order? Not a murmur is heard, not a sigh is uttered, not a tear starts forth: All is submision, all is composure and resignation. Nay, when they were near the place of execution, and the child, with an innocent curiosity, proposes to him that cutting question, "my father, behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" with what an unparalleled fortitude and serenity does he answer, "my son, God will provide himself "a lamb for a burnt-offering?" How finely then does the example of Abraham teach us to adore and submit to the will of God, though we cannnot comprehend the reasons on which it is founded!—He believed and obeyed, when God

spake, though the voice seemed contrary to reason:—And surely, then, it can be no hardship for us to believe and obey, when God speaks what is above our reason, and to submit the pride of human understanding to the depths of infinite wisdom. Whenever, therefore, our thoughts recoil at the sublime mysteries of the Gospel, and refuse to believe what they cannot comprehend, let us remember the humble docility of the good old Patriarch, and receive the doctrines of heaven with the meekness of little children.

Again: How nobly does this example teach us, that even the dearest of our enjoyments are cheerfully to be sacrificed to the good pleasure of God, whenever he thinks fit to recal what he had lent to us, but for a few moments!—It is hard, indeed, to weep over the grave of a beloved parent, or to follow the blasted remains of an affectionate husband or wife:—it is hard to see a child, a favourite child, an only child, cut down, in the prime of life, and withered like an untimely flower:—it is hard, like Job, to be bereaved of a whole family, a flourishing progeny of sons and daughters, in one day: yet these are sorrows, to which we are all of us called, in turns, and to which we must be called, so long as change and chance prevail in the world. We should

should, therefore, prepare our souls to bear with fortitude, what we cannot avoid. We should remember, that, even in our severest trials of affliction, we are not commanded to bind our beloved son, to lay him on the altar, and stretch forth our hand to give the stroke of death. Yet Abraham cheerfully submitted to so hard a task, because it was the will of his Father in heaven. Let us, therefore, learn from him to bear the strokes and corrections of God with resignation; and though we must be sorry as men, yet let us not be "sorry as men without hope;" since we know, that the same God, who gave, and hath now taken away, can also restore the objects, once of our love, now of our sorrow and regret. Lastly, let the example of Abraham teach us to believe firmly that most important article of all our faith and hopes, that God is able to raise us up from the dead. That venerable Patriarch, when called to the severe trial of slaying his child, cheerfully went, though he knew neither the reasons nor the event of his journey. But of this, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us, he was firmly persuaded, that God was able, if it should be necessary, to raise him up, even from the dead. And the same persuasion should be our consolation, amidst all the trials we suffer. We should remember, that our sufferings are but

for a few moments, and that after our release from the miseries of this sinful world, God is able to raise us up to life eternal. And surely we have much more reason to believe this important article, than Abraham could possibly have. His views were afar off, and therefore dim and obscure: but ours are near at hand, and illuminated with the irresistible rays of demonstration. We have not only the voice of God to assure, that the dead in Christ shall be raised, but we have seen the dead themselves come forth. We have seen the Redeemer of the world standing, amidst a family of sorrow, at the grave of Lazarus: we have heard that godlike command, "Lazarus, come forth:" we have beheld the astonished prisoner of the grave start into life; and, lastly, we have seen the same Redeemer of the world triumph over death and the grave, to assure us, that if we die with him, we shall also live with him.

Since then the evidences we have, are so much stronger than those of the devout Patriarch, let not our faith and obedience be weaker than his:—let not the enlightened Christian stagger, where the less-informed Jew overcame:—let not the disciple of grace be inferior to the disciple of promise:—but rather,

let

let us endeavour to tread in the steps of Abraham, the friend of God, by a stedfast faith, by a ready obedience, by a cheerful resignation of ourselves and ours to his will; that when this frail and uncertain life is ended, we may be carried by angels into Abraham's bosom.

SERMON IV.

LUKE xix. 41.

And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it.

AND well might he weep!—Well might his "eyes run down with tears, and his eye-"lids gush out with waters," when he reflected on the impending miseries of the city he then beheld!

Jerusalem, the glory of nations, the seat of prophets, the dwelling place of God,—within a few years to be utterly destroyed, and become "an habitation of dragons!"

Jerusalem, the highly-favoured city, once the the scene of so many singular mercies and providences, within a few months, to become the theatre of the bloodiest tragedy the sun ever saw,

saw,—even the ignominious death of the Son of God himself!

These are reflections, which would have drawn tears from the eyes of an unfeeling savage:—what sensations then must they have awaked, in the breast of the compassionate and tender Jesus,—himself a Jew,—himself the gracious messenger of heaven, whose mercies she rejected,—himself the lamb, who was to be slain within her walls,—himself that guiltless victim, whose unexpiated blood was to draw down vengeance and ruin, upon her temples and palaces!

And how must his sorrow have been embittered by reflecting, that all these things were to come upon it, not through any unfortunate chance, or natural disaster, which even good men may sometimes suffer,—but through its manifold and crying sins, its whoredoms, its adulteries, its oppressions, and other great and flagrant enormities, which called down the just visitation of heaven!

What an aggravation, again, must it have been to his grief, to reflect, that there was a time, when she might have known "the things "which belonged to her peace;"—that there was a time, when the Almighty would have "gathered

" gathered her children together, even as a hen " gathereth her chickens under her wings ;"— that there was a time, when he warned her by his prophets, and invited her to repentance, by his promises ;—but that these things were, now, hid from her eyes ;—that her doom was, now, unchangeably fixed ;—that nothing, now, remained, " but a certain fearful looking for of " judgment, and fiery indignation," for all her sins, and " for all the righteous blood shed " upon the earth, from the blood of righteous " Abel, to the blood of Zacharias, son of Bara- " chias, who was slain between the temple and " the altar !"

Such were, probably, the causes, which made the Son of God weep over Jerusalem, when he beheld it.—And, I dare say, your thoughts have anticipated me, in the application of these affecting words, to this great and flourishing kingdom.—It is a thought, which naturally arises from considering the fate of one once-mighty nation, to reflect a moment, what also may be the fate of another.

And would to God there was not too much room for the parallel ; too much room for every one, that beholds this great and sinful nation, like Jesus also, to weep over it !—It is an un-

grateful task, to hold up to view the crimes and follies of our fellow-creatures and fellow-subjects: as a private individual, I abhor the task: —but ungrateful as it is, it must be done: where the danger is great, silence is guilt:—important, though unwelcome, truths, are not to be dissembled:—ill would it become the prophets of the Lord, to cry Peace, Peace, where there is no peace:—It was the curse of the Jews, to be lulled in a fatal security: but let it not be ours, who have their fate before us, for an example.

If, therefore, I lay open to your consideration, without disguise, a portrait of guilt, which will startle the feelings of humanity, the intention must justify the fact:—For, where diseases are dangerous and inveterate, severer remedies become necessary and commendable.

I will begin with what ought ever to be first in our thoughts, the service and reverence we owe to the God that made us. And in this, I am shocked to say, that we are, many degrees, worse than the Jews themselves. They had, indeed, lost the spirit and genius of their religion; —they were blind and perverse;—they wasted their time in superstitious purifications and ridiculous ceremonies, unworthy of the exalted majesty of God. But then, the light they enjoyed was

was originally small, in comparison of ours; and even that little had been gradually obscured by a long succession of ages, in which they had been left to their own guidance: and yet, after all, though they had lost the vital power, they, at least, retained the form of godliness: they sometimes thought erroneously, but they always both thought and spoke with reverence, of God and religion.

But have not we, who enjoy the glorious light of the gospel, the same, or even greater crimes to answer for, and with much greater degrees of aggravation? The beams of life and immortality, have, indeed, shone upon our hearts; but can it be denied, that they have also shone in vain? Do not Atheism and Infidelity stalk, with unblushing impudence, through the land, meet us in every place of resort, and insult our understandings, in every publication? Does not a general contempt of religion run through the higher and lower ranks of men, and an avowed neglect of it through all?

We are, indeed, the purest part of the purest religion, in our doctrines and discipline: we have been emancipated, by the blood of martyrs, from the galling yoke of papal tyranny, and papal superstition: but what will this avail us,

if

if our lives correspond not to the purity and freedom of the religion we profess! We may laugh, if we please, at the superstitious corruptions of the church of Rome: it is perhaps impossible not to do so: one must blush for the weakness of human nature, to see a poor zealot, kneeling at the shrine of a smoaky saint, or bowing with reverence, to a time-worn relique: yet, even something may be learnt from this misguided zeal, when it proceeds, as no doubt it often does, from a heart truly contrite and devout: it may justly reproach that coldness and indifference, which is too much seen amongst the generality of protestants. It is, no doubt, the perfection of religion, where zeal and knowledge are united: and would to God they were ever so united! But, if they must be separated, surely it will be no presumption to say, that God will sooner accept zeal without knowledge, than knowledge without zeal. And whether ours is not the latter case, no man, that weighs the state of religion amongst us, can one moment doubt. In the general commerce of the world, is there the smallest trace of it to be seen? Does it give firmness to the commercial contract, or inspire decency into the haunts of social resort? Is it tolerated among the polite, or named with respect among the vulgar? In short, do we behold any thing, but our churches

and

and our ceremonies, that discriminate the metropolis of Britain, from idolatrous Memphis or pagan Rome?

And if we turn from the general intercourse of man with man, to those times and places, which are set apart for the immediate intercourse of man with his Maker; how little do we there find of the spirit, or even the appearance of religion? It were not beyond the truth to affirm, that, whilst every other multiplying place of resort is crouded, the temples of God, alone, are deserted:—every foolish amusement, every trifling avocation, serves as a plea for not attending them.

And, where our churches are attended, how little does a spirit of devotion, too often, appear?—Enter the doors of the sanctuary: see the congregation employed in whispers, smiles, and salutations,—often lost in the insensibility of sleep, or, at the best, attending with a cold and listless indifference;—is it possible to imagine, that they are addressing themselves to a God of infinite power, for a blessing on themselves and their families, for every thing that is desirable in heaven, or valuable on earth? Yet such is the behaviour, every where visible, in our churches: and even where attention shows itself,

itself, is it not, too often, confined to a fanatic tone, or theatric gesture, to the crude effusions of enthusiasm, or the florid absurdity of declamation, in those novel assemblies, which every where abound; whilst the noblest composition in the world, next to the book of God, I mean the Liturgy, is neglected and despised, as a dead and unprofitable letter?

And if such be the case, with regard to our public devotions, how much is it to be feared, that our private ones are still less regarded! But the devotions of the closet are open to God alone, and, therefore, I will not presume to condemn what cannot be known by man's judgment: in these, to his heavenly Master, every Christian standeth or falleth.

But if we pass from the adoration of the Almighty, to that reverence, which is due to him upon other occasions, what abundant matter shall we find, for melancholy reflection and humiliation!—Is it not shocking, to see that holy religion, which he sent down his only Son, from heaven, to teach, made the instrument of hellish contention by perverse or designing men, distorted into absurd meanings by illiterate sectaries, profaned by daring infidels, and neglected by wicked Christians?

And

And if, from this melancholy view of religious, we pass on to social duties, shall we not find equal cause for reproach and condemnation?—As a nation, may we not justly, on many occasions, be branded with the most opprobrious cruelty and injustice? Can memory, can history, can satire produce a scene of more atrocious villainy, than has repeatedly been executed by the inhabitants of some of our foreign settlements? Let depopulated nations, stripped of their territories, their commerce, their treasures, their lives, without even a shadow of right or just pretence;—let solemn treaties, violated without any provocation or ground, for the sake of rapine;—let men like ourselves, bought and sold, fed and beaten, like brute beasts;—let ministerial fortunes, raised on violence and bloodshed;—let Asiatic luxury, and a spirit of despotic tyranny, imported with Asiatic wealth, into this unhappy land,—let all these say, whether we have not deserved the severest reproaches that can be laid upon us;—whether we have not equalled the hellish machinations of Spanish barbarity, or inquisitorial vengeance.

And are we at all better, in our private capacities? Has not an immoderate thirst of pleasure and expence, directly contrary to the wise frugality of our ancestors, and essentially destruc-

tive to a commercial nation, infected all ranks among us? Has not this introduced the most fatal and fraudulent methods of supporting that expence? From this poisoned fountain, derive we not the itch of gaming, the phrenzy of lotteries, the chicanery of law, the invention of new frauds, pretended bankruptcies, fictitious credit, false insurances, wilful fires, and ten thousand other schemes of desperate villany, unheard of and unknown to former ages?

Nor let any one tell me, that this representation of our vices, is the gloomy picture of spleen, or the declamation of enthusiasm:—that it has been the fashion of all ages, to complain of the badness of the times; but that we are, in reality, no worse than our ancestors. I will readily allow him, that the times have been always bad; that human nature has been, and ever will be, corrupt and perverse; but the ruin of ancient nations, brought on by a gradual advance in wickedness, will leave no room to doubt, that the guilt of a nation is, commonly, of a progressive nature;—that states, like men, have their periods of rise and decline;—and I will farther add, that, however some individuals of former times may have been corrupt, to as great a degree as in the present, yet, that wickedness was never so glaring and universal, never

so

so systematically digested, or so openly professed, never appeared in so various and prodigious instances, never triumphed over virtue with so much effrontery, and so much success.

And, if this representation of our vices be true, it is, in the second place, no less true, that these vices tend to the destruction of the state:— "For a general corruption of manners is not "only the certain symptom and presage, that "a nation is ripe for ruin, but is the natural "cause and principle of the decay and destruc- "tion of all governments *." For, where an inordinate love of pleasure prevails, it naturally extinguishes every manly and generous sentiment in the breasts of a people. Where selfishness and party spirit have taken root, it is impossible that public spirit should long subsist. Where crimes are supported by numbers, and countenanced by example, few will be ambitious of doing well, none will be ashamed of doing ill. And, when virtue has once lost her hold upon the consciences of men; when private interest is preferred to public advantage; when fame and honour are become empty names; when men contend not, who shall excel in supporting the falling interests of their country, but rather,

* Moyle.

in extending private influence, and enlarging their own property; when, in these contentions, every bound of decency, justice, and humanity is overleaped,—every art of violence, falsehood, and chicanery is practised; what is there, that can uphold the credit and well-being of a state? What is there, that can prevent a total relaxation and contempt of order and authority? What will avail the fences of legal restraint, or royal dignity? What shall enforce submission abroad, or check lawless riot and defiance at home? What, in short, shall shield us from general ruin, that stands ready to meet us, in a thousand shapes? The virtue of individuals may indeed, it is to be hoped, awhile respite our fate, and prevent the accomplishment of that destruction we have deserved. But let not this hope carry us too far: the virtue of individuals may suspend, but it cannot stop, the ruin of a nation. This only can be effected by a general change of manners and principles. Nor, without this change, can even this private virtue itself be of long duration: for, though the branches may, for a time, retain the appearance of verdure, yet, where the root is thus wounded and corrupted, they will soon partake of the general decay, and, with the parent tree, will tend, by a hasty progress, to inevitable ruin.

If, therefore, our sins be so flagrant and enormous, and these sins so certainly tend to ruin and extirpation; have we not just cause to weep over this our Jerusalem, and to fear the signal judgments of God hanging over us? Nor let any fancy themselves unconcerned in the dreadful consequences, to be apprehended from our multiplied sins: for, however the best of us may flatter ourselves with security, from our own righteousness, it is a truth, not to be disputed, that, in national judgments, all must suffer. The pious Abraham, indeed, reverently said, "to destroy the righteous with the wicked, "that be far from thee;" but events prove, that destruction, like the grave, knows no distinction.

When, therefore, the judgments of God are abroad in the earth, let none flatter themselves with vain hopes of exemption or security. The way, and the only way, to avoid them, is a general and unfeigned sorrow and humiliation before God: for national crimes demand national expiation; and, where every man, by his sins, has contributed his share to the danger of his country, every man, by his repentance, must contribute to save it. But they should, especially, take the lead in this important duty, whose stations, or superior rank, whose influ-

ence, or authority, have contributed to infect the manners of the people with corruption, and therefore may, and ought also to take the lead in restoring true piety, and unfeigned virtue. If, therefore, any part of the guilt of this land has begun at the sanctuary, where it ought least to have begun, it is the duty of the priests, the ministers of the Lord, to weep between the porch and the altar, for their own sins, and the sins of the people.—If venality, lust, and impiety have been derived, from the nobles of the land, to the lower orders among us; let them be the first, to exert the influence, which they receive from their superior rank, to repair the breaches of the Lord, and to humble themselves before God, in sackcloth and ashes.—If the magistrates, by neglecting to enforce those salutary laws, with the execution of which they are entrusted, have given stability to violence, and confidence to impiety; let them atone for their past negligence, by exemplary penitence and devotion, and by a steady, vigorous, and impartial exercise of their power.—And, if the masters and guardians of families have, by their example and practice, countenanced a neglect of God's sabbaths, and his divine worship, or the practice of vice and profaneness; let them, for the future, repair to the house of God, with their sons and their daughters, their men-servants

vants and their maid-servants, that the house of God may be full, and that they may fall down, with united hearts and voices, before the Lord their maker: and, at the same time, let them, at home, be patterns to their children and dependents, in repentance, meekness, sobriety, and every other Christian virtue.

And this repentance is incumbent upon every one of us, my brethren, from the strongest motives, that can actuate a reasonable creature,—a regard for ourselves, our country, our church, and our posterity. And surely, such arguments as these, cannot want any additional weight:—they need not eloquence to enforce, or persuasion to recommend them;—they speak for themselves, by an irresistible power: for let every man seriously ask himself only these plain and obvious questions:—Is it nothing, that I am devoting myself to the flames of hell,—that I am betraying that country to destruction, for whose defence the blood of so many brave Britons has been spilt;—that I am subverting the foundations of that pure church, which is the glory of protestantism, and the pillar of Christianity itself;—that I am entailing slavery and vengeance upon my posterity?—Let any man ask himself these questions, and it is impossible not to foresee what answer he must return;—it

is impossible not to foresee, that the duties of repentance and obedience will press themselves upon him with redoubled force and energy.

To these great arguments, therefore, let me call upon you seriously to attend. As reasonable creatures, weigh and consider the consequences of your actions. Let not misguiding custom, or erroneous example, thoughtless dissipation, or prevalent interest, be your only guides: ye have much nobler views to direct you, if ye will but attend to them: they can but lead you to present destruction, and future misery; but present glory awaits the paths of virtue, here, and the gates of immortality are open to her, hereafter.

Begin, therefore, the great and important work of repentance, whilst it is yet in your power. Behold this great and sinful nation, and in earnest weep over it.—In this your day, at least, know the things which belong to your peace; lest the fatal sentence of Jerusalem should, too soon, be added,—" but now these " things are hid from thine eyes."

SERMON V.

PROVERBS xxiv. 21.

My son, fear thou the Lord and the King; and meddle not with them that are given to change.

WHEN a daring spirit of anarchy and confusion seems to prevail through the world, it becomes the duty of every man whose situation in life gives him the opportunity, to inculcate the lessons of obedience and subordination, contained in the words of the text; and to endeavour to extinguish that torch of sedition, which, in the hands of a few misguided zealots, is ready to scatter fire and devastation through the land. I need not tell you, that the Book of Proverbs, from which these words are taken, was penned by that excellent spirit of wisdom, which descendeth from above, and is, therefore, deserving of our highest attention. And, in deed, were we ignorant of this circumstance, the various

various precepts it contains, would sufficiently recommend themselves to our esteem, by their intrinsic worth and importance; as being grounded on unquestionable truth, expressed in very intelligible language, and, by their sententious brevity, easy to be retained.

We are not, however, vainly to imagine, that all the precepts there delivered, are to be understood in rigorous strictness of speech, or in the utmost severity of construction. We are rather to interpret them according to that equitable consideration of circumstances and times, which every general proposition requires; which, though generally true and fitting, will always admit of some exceptions. Thus, for example; where this wise King tells us, "Train up a "child in the way he should go, and, when he "is old, he will not depart from it;" we can have no doubt of the general truth and propriety of the precept. But should we from thence conclude, that no child, who has been well educated, ever deviates from the good way in which he has been trained, we should only expose ourselves to ridicule, by contradicting the experience of all ages. For, though the greater part of those, who fall under the just vindiction of the law, owe their ruin to a neglected or vicious education, yet there are too many also amongst them, the

the unhappy offspring of virtuous and honest parents, whom no precepts of wisdom could control, whom no influence of example could sway, whom no restraints of parental authority could guard from destruction. And, with the same equitable construction, are we to understand that precept in the text, which forbids us "to med-"dle with them that are given to change." For, though there can be no doubt, that a meddling and contentious spirit, which is ever hunting after imaginary grievances and causes of discontent, is highly to be condemned, and avoided, yet on the other hand, there are occasions, where change becomes necessary, and where the first principles of nature, and of society, and of reason, call upon us "to meddle "with them that are given to change." And, in the same qualified sense also, are we to understand the precept here delivered, of "fearing "the king."

Fear is, in itself, the most ignoble passion that inhabits the human breast. If we consider its origin, it is ever the child of guilt and disobedience: for, when man came from the hands of his Maker, pure and unspotted, he was fearless, because he was innocent: but, no sooner had he forfeited that innocence, than fear succeeded; "I heard thy voice," said our unhappy first

first parent, to his offended God, "and was "afraid." If, therefore, our fear of the king should originate from conscious guilt, or the dread of impending evil, it would be slavish and abject, and, therefore, can never be supposed to be recommended to us by the pen of inspired wisdom. And, indeed, who would wish to inculcate into the breasts of their subjects, such a fear as this; except such monsters in human shape as a Tiberius or a Caligula, who could willingly be content to be hated, so long as they were feared.

But the fear here recommended, is a filial sense of love and duty; which will lead us to shew our reverence to the king, by a strict obedience to his laws, and by a just respect to his person and government. In one word, it is what St. Peter means, when he commands us to "fear God, and honour the king."

Having thus cleared the words of the text from those inconvenient consequences, which would follow from too strict and rigorous an interpretation of them, I shall proceed to lay before you,

First, The necessity of fearing God;

Secondly,

Secondly, The duty of honouring the King; and,

Thirdly, The danger of meddling with such as are given to change.

I need not, perhaps, inform you, that the fear of God is here put for the sum and substance of religion; which, in scripture language, is frequently expressed by some of its leading and constituent parts. Thus, the knowledge of God and of his Son Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, is sometimes said to be eternal life: and again, sometimes Faith is called the only requisite for salvation; as where it is said, "He that be-"lieveth, and is baptized, shall be saved." And, in the same manner, the fear of God is put for the whole duty of man; especially by the writers of the Old Testament, who seem always to consider it as the fountain of knowledge and wisdom, of temporal and eternal happiness.

We must, however, remark, that it is not every fear of God, which answers to these high and glorious characters of wisdom and illumination. For there is a slavish and abject fear of him, which proceeds from a dreadful apprehension of his power and justice, and which, therefore,

fore, pourtrays his majesty in flames of terror, which no man dares approach unto. But such a fear as this is far removed from that true and religious fear, which is here recommended. It is rather the child of guilt and ignorance, which, knowing not how to worship God aright, has recourse to superstitious and vain rites, to flattering and childish devotions, or to ostentatious works of penance or supererogation. And from this servile fear, sprang all that innumerable catalogue of heathen Deities, which disgrace the annals of Paganism: "Primos in orbe Deos fecit "timor," said the poet very justly: and from the same fruitful source their temples were erected, their groves consecrated, their images adored, and their shrines enriched.

But though we are no where commanded to entertain this base and abject dread of the power and justice of God, yet there are sufficient reasons to induce every thinking person to preserve that filial awe and reverence of him, which the sacred writings every where inculcate.

The first I shall mention is, that all the kind promises and blessings of God, both to individuals and communities, are every where expressly annexed to it, and depend upon it. "They that "honour him, he will honour, and they that "despise

"despise him, shall be lightly esteemed," is the constant and invariable language of holy writ. And this is no less true with regard to kings, than subjects. For as by God alone kings reign, so also, by him alone they reign in glory. And the whole strain of sacred history bears testimony to the truth of this, in every period. Thus, when the froward and unthinking Israelites had rejected that wonderful theocracy, by which they had long been guided and preserved, the first injunction laid upon them was, "to fear the Lord, and to serve him "in truth, and with all their heart;" an injunction strengthened by this alarming denunciation, that "if they did wickedly they should "be consumed both they and their king."— And this both king and people found to be true by melancholy experience: for when they had forsaken his covenant, and broken down his altars, he also forsook them, and brake the strength of their martial prowess: he made them flee, when no man pursued, and gave them over for a prey unto their enemies: he smote them with diseases of body, perplexity of mind, with poverty, oppression, and captivity; so that, like their present wretched descendants, they became a hissing and a bye-word, among all nations where they were scattered. From these judgments of God, therefore, let all the nations of the

the earth learn righteousness; learn to fear God; and serve him in truth, and with all their heart, lest both they and their kings should be consumed.

But, besides this reason for fearing God, grounded on a regard for the public welfare, there are also other considerations, no less important, which will lead us to fear and serve him, out of a regard for our own private happiness. "O fear the Lord," says holy David, "ye that "are his saints: for they that fear him lack "nothing." And again: "He hath given "meat to them that fear him: he will ever be "mindful of his covenant. God is therefore "very greatly to be feared in the council of "the saints, and to be had in reverence of "all them that are round about him;" as being the spring and fountain of every temporal blessing.

And if, to these, we add the spiritual advantages derived from the fear of God, the argument will rise still higher, and press more forcibly upon us. "The secret of the Lord is "among them that fear him," says the royal Psalmist, "and he will shew them his covenant." —"His salvation is nigh them that fear him, "that glory may dwell in our land." Can there be

be more glorious privileges annexed to any duty? Can there be stronger arguments to recommend the fear of God?

If, again, we consider the natural effect of fearing God, upon the several members of civil society, what abundant cause have we to wish, that the practice of this duty were universal. Justice might then sheath her avenging sword, and the solemn pomp of judicature would no longer strike terror into every feeling breast. We should then see the happy accomplishment of that prediction of the future kingdom of the Messias, so beautifully described by the prophet Isaiah: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, "and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; "and the calf, and the young lion, and the fat- "ling together, and a little child shall lead "them: they shall not hurt nor destroy in all "my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full "of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters "cover the sea." And where this fear or knowledge of God is wanting, how vain and fruitless is every other fence, against the invasion of secret depredation or open violence! Our penal laws are multiplied, beyond the example of former ages and nations: our executions (though, from the natural humanity of our gracious sovereign, justice is amply tempered with mercy)

are doubled; new modes of punishment are devised also: and yet, notwithstanding all this, neither life nor property, at least in the vicinity of the metropolis, neither the dwellings of man, nor the altars of God himself, are for a moment safe; our prisons swarm with abandoned wretches, the robber still walketh in darkness, and the ruffian destroyeth at noon-day; nay, to such a pitch of wickedness are we arrived, that audacious villany laughs at the impotent terrors of legal vindiction, and legislative wisdom is unable to provide adequate remedies for the new, and various, and multiplying frauds of artful deception.

Secondly, After this necessary fear of God, the wise author of my text recommends the duty of fearing, or honouring, the king.

And for the performance of this duty, however little, at present, regarded, among the numerous demagogues who are daily starting out of the prolific soil of faction, many and cogent reasons may be assigned.

1st, Kings are God's deputies, or vice-gerents, here upon earth. They derive their power from him, and are the instruments, which his providence has made choice of, to govern and protect

tect the world in peace and quietness. And this was not only clearly allowed by Christ and his apostles, in their doctrine, but was also fully confirmed by their own practice and demeanour. Thus, when the tribute-money was brought to our Saviour, let the rights of Cæsar be what they would, he clearly determines that it is a duty to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. Nor is there a single word in the writings of the Apostles, which tends either to the questioning, or limitation, of the powers in being: for, sunk and debased as those powers were, the disciples of Christ considered them as ordained of God, and therefore, in all things lawful and honest, shewed a ready and willing obedience to them, without pretending to dispute, control, or subvert their authority. And in their doctrines, instead of investigating the origin of government, or defining the prerogative of princes, or stating the pretended unalienable rights of individuals, the novel language of modern days, they exhort men, in the strongest terms, to obey such as have the rule over them: to submit to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake: to pray for kings, and all that are in authority. And both St. Peter and St. Paul threaten such as despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities, with some heavy judg-

ment; which our translators render by the severe word damnation.

And, indeed, the very heathens themselves so clearly saw the necessity of supporting the dignity of imperial characters, that we find the Romans constantly stiling their magistrates sacred; that so, having, as it were, the name and character of God upon them, the people might reverence their persons, and venerate their office. Nor was this wise and salutary idea removed, till the violence of tribunician phrenzy levelled all distinctions, and converted the mildness of a dutiful and submissive people, into the savage fury of a wild and ungovernable monster.

2dly, We are bound, by every principle of gratitude, to honour kings, both on account of the troubles they undergo in the necessary administration of government, and also, in respect of the benefits accruing to us from their care and attention.

There are, I believe, few crowns which are not, like that of our great Master, plaited with thorns: I mean, that every prince, who pays a due regard to the duties of his station, is in a state of continual anxiety. The redress of growing

growing grievances must spring from his paternal foresight and affection. The mistakes or miscarriages of his ministers wound his reputation, and, what is still more aggravating, the wisdom of the prince is too often unjustly traduced for the people's folly, which will not suffer him to pursue the necessary measures for the support of his dignity, and the safety of his kingdom. So that what the Roman annalist said of war may, not unfitly, be applied to government: "Iniquissima hæc bellorum conditio est: prospera omnes sibi vindicant: adversa uni imputantur*. Again, the height of a prince's situation sets him above all the dearest pleasures of society and friendship, and, in their place, substitutes all the forms and impertinence of ceremonial restraint: he can neither sit down without care, nor walk abroad without trouble: so that he is certainly less to be envied for the pageantry which accompanies him, than to be pitied for the hardships it brings with it. And therefore, if kings, for the sake of public advantage, and the security of individuals, will subject themselves to these inconveniencies, it is certainly the duty of subjects, in return, to pay every reasonable acknowledgment of gratitude

* This is the hard and unjust condition of war: every one lays claim to a share of its prosperous events: its miscarriages are imputed to one alone.

and respect towards them. And this, first, by reverencing their persons and government.

It has been too much the fashion of the present times to rail at superiors, and to speak evil of such things as we do not understand, and which, in fact, do not belong to us, if we did. But men would do well to remember, that, though this may for a time answer the purposes of party, by distressing those to whom the public welfare is intrusted, yet it is ever attended with the greatest danger to all, by obliterating those ideas of subordination from the minds of the populace, without which no socicty can long subsist. For it should always be remembered, that the madness of the people, when once excited, becomes like the raging of the waves, fierce and uncontrolable, and has, not unfrequently, overwhelmed those very persons who have been the most forward in exciting it.

However, therefore, we may differ in opinion from those who govern, we ought to be extremely cautious of expressing any disrespect for their persons, or of weakening the operations of their government, by an incautious or intemperate censure of its measures.

3dly,

3dly, We ought to shew our respect to the king, by a ready obedience to his laws.

"To obey" we are told in holy writ, "is "better than sacrifice, and to hearken, than the "fat of rams." And if this be the case even of kings themselves, in relation to God, who in that respect are no other than subjects to the King of kings, it cannot be otherwise with us who are their subjects. And, whatever men may pretend, under the specious names of patriotism or public good, it is as great a solecism in politics, for a man to call himself a good subject, who lives in contempt and defiance of the laws of his country, as it is in religion, for a man to call himself a good Christian, who lives in direct contradiction to the precepts of the Gospel. Such a mask is too thin to deceive any but the credulous and unthinking vulgar, and will never impose on those who, in political as well as religious matters, think it the wisest and safest way not to give credit to every pretender to superior excellence, on his own word, but rather, to judge of the tree by its fruits.

Lastly, We ought to shew our respect to the king, by not "meddling with those who are "given to change."

The necessary qualifications which some politicians have required in a leader of faction, are much eloquence and little understanding: much eloquence to persuade and mislead others, but not understanding enough to foresee the dangers arising from his own conduct, lest he should be discouraged from his ruinous enterprises. And men of these qualifications are to be found in every state; who, under pretence of redressing imaginary grievances, or of reforming abuses, which never existed, are ever ready to turn the world upside down. But, before men give way to their insidious harangues, they would do well to consider, what the experience of all ages will teach them, that, however specious the pretences of such demagogues may be, self-interest generally lies at the bottom of all they do or say; that, however some grievances may and must exist, even in the best and wisest civil constitutions, yet that an imperfect administration is preferable to that anarchy and violence, which always follows the subversion of legal and settled government; and, lastly, that, however the powers of government may change hands, yet that the people are seldom gainers by the change. And should any man doubt the truth of these positions, we need only refer him to the consideration of those unhappy times in our own country, when regal authority was abolished,

fished, and the powers of government usurped by factious disturbers or canting zealots; or again, to those successive revolutions in the Roman state, by which the governing powers were transferred, in turns, to kings, consuls, tribunes, triumvirates, decemvirates, and emperors, and in each of which the people, ever shifting, ever restless, gained only an accumulated load of misery and oppression. If, indeed, our constitutional liberties were taken from us,—if we were forcibly disseized of our property,—if the laws were trampled under foot, and the iron hand of power, or the wide-stretched grasp of prerogative, were ready to snatch away our sacred claims or chartered rights,—we might then justly complain, and think it time to look for expedients and defenders. But the reverse of all these things is true; and, for a striking proof of this, I need only appeal singly, to the impartiality with which justice is administered to all ranks of people, by men of the first abilities, and now happily independent of the will of the Crown, to convince every reasonable man that he is a free member of the most mild, wise, and equitable government in the world; which, therefore, it is his interest, as well as his duty, to support by every mark of chearful obedience in himself, and by discouraging every factious innovation in others. Let, therefore, past experience

perience teach us wisdom; and, whilst we sit every man under his own vine and under his own fig-tree, let us "fear God and honour the "King;" let us study to be quiet, without pretending to interfere in things which no way belong to us, and without meddling with those that are given to change.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

LUKE xi. 2.

And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father, which art in heaven.

THE disciples of our blessed Saviour having requested him to teach them to pray, as John had taught his disciples, he, with that readiness with which he ever listened to the real wants and infirmities of men, condescends to instruct them in that form, which is the most expressive of all the real wants and infirmities of men, and the best suited to all times and occasions. It has, accordingly, been wisely adopted by our Church in her several offices:—we teach it to our children in their earliest rudiments of Christian knowledge:—we conclude all our own imperfect addresses to heaven with it:—and would to God I could also say, that we are as earnest

earnest as we ought to be, whenever our lips are opened to pronounce it!

Since, therefore, it is of such general use and importance, I hope that such a short and familiar explanation of it, as may lead us to consider the nature and importance of it, however it may want the charms of novelty, will neither be unnecessary nor unprofitable, especially to the younger part of my audience, to whom I wish to be considered as now more immediately addressing myself.

Before I enter upon the consideration of the particular parts, of which this excellent prayer is composed, it may not be improper to make two general remarks:

First, That it was intended for all capacities, and, therefore, is plain and simple:—it was intended for all degrees, high and low, rich and poor, and is, therefore, comprehensive, and expressive of the wants of all:—and, at the same time, it is short; teaching us thereby, that the God to whom we address ourselves wants no information; and also, that not the length, but the sincerity, of our petitions, will be regarded by him.

Secondly,

Secondly, I would remark, that the several parts of this prayer are disposed in the wisest and most becoming order. It is addressed to God, our heavenly Father: his honour and veneration are therefore, fitly, first considered. We pray, that his name may be hallowed by men, his kingdom enlarged, and his will done upon earth, with the same alacrity as it is done in heaven. And, having thus declared our zeal for God's glory, we next pray to him for a supply for our own wants and infirmities, as well for the body as the soul: that he will supply our daily necessities with daily support; that he will forgive us those past sins, which wound and lacerate our consciences, and guard us from those future assaults, which may endanger our virtue. And, lastly, we acknowledge his power to do all this, by declaring him the sovereign Lord, to whom belongs the kingdom, power, and glory, for ever and ever.

After these two general remarks, let us proceed to consider the several parts, of which this excellent prayer is composed.

It begins with a prefatory address to God, in these comprehensive words, "Our Father, which "art in heaven." This leads us to consider him, to whom we address ourselves,

First,

First, As the great Author of the universe, who formed the heavens and the earth, who appointed the revolving succession of times and seasons, who created beasts and creeping things, and, above all, who called man into life, the best and noblest of his works; who formed him in his own image, and gave him dominion over all the rest of the creation.

Secondly, As the Preserver of all:—and of man above all, who most wants his support. Every man feels the superintending hand of God, from his youth up:—through his providence he has been held up, ever since he was born; every man, therefore, should gratefully own it, when he calls upon God by this title.

In these two senses, of a Creator and Preserver, God is a common Father to all. The scattered tribes of Israel, the untutored savages and remotest nations, however disjoined by situation, or diversified by culture, are all the children of his care and love: in the language of the prophet, "they have all one Father, one "God hath created them." But we have a peculiar and more distinguished title to call him our Father: for, to the Christian he is a Father indeed; having given to him a power, in a more especial manner to be called the child of God, through

through faith in Christ Jesus. We had, indeed, before, the common right to call God our Father; but it was, then, a name surrounded with inexpressible terror:—we were the guilty offspring of a rebellious parent, and, therefore, dared not to look up to our heavenly Father with comfort; but, through the blood of his dear Son, being now reconciled to him, we approach him with humble confidence, and are enabled to cry out, in the language of reconciliation, "'Abba, Father."

But, whilst we are thus addressing him under the endearing title of a Father, it cannot escape our notice, that the following words, "which art "in heaven," at the same time, lead us to remember him also under the awful title of a God. He is, indeed, our Father, but he is our Father, who is in heaven:—He is that high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity:—heaven is his throne, and earth his footstool. Not that God is limited to any particular place; for he filleth all space, and is present every where, nor are the heaven of heavens able to contain him: but he is called our Father in heaven, because there he more immediately dwells in light inaccessible; there is the throne of his glory, from whence his commands are issued, and from which he

he looketh down upon the children of men, and considereth all their works.

Upon the whole, then, every Christian, who addresses himself to God under the character of his Father in heaven, must be understood to speak this language:—

I apply myself to thee, O God, as the Creator of the world, who formedst all things by thy power:—I apply myself to thee, O God, as the great Parent of the universe, who calledst me and all mankind into life, and still continuest to preserve and support me by thy providence: I apply myself to thee, O God, as the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort, who formedst the gracious plan of man's redemption, and vouchsafest to pardon my sins, through the all-sufficient merits of thy dear Son:—I tremble, indeed, at thy majesty, because thou art in heaven, and I on earth:—I fear to approach thy presence, because thou art a God, and I am a poor worm of mortality:—yet thy love emboldens me to draw near thee with faith:—I come to thy altars with filial confidence, because thou condescendest to acknowledge thyself my Father.

And

And what then are the affections and sentiments, which this awful address ought to suggest to every one that uses it?

First, then: is God the Creator of the world, and all that it contains? How little reason, then, have we to overvalue ourselves on account of any thing we possess in it? How will all our boasted accomplishments shrink into nothing, when we consider, that they are only the gift of God, bestowed upon us without any merit or concurrence of our own. We are the clay, and he is the potter, and we all are the work of his hands, who called us from nothing into existence;—who called us from mingling with the clods of the valley, to the powers of reason and the hopes of immortality. Let us, therefore, adore the hand that made and fashioned us, and let us not presume to make idols of ourselves, or vainly fancy, let our station or abilities be what they will, that we are any thing better than sinful dust and ashes.

Secondly, Were the God to whom we are commanded to address ourselves, a hard and severe master,—were he extreme to mark what is done amiss,—we should all of us draw near him with terror; since all of us have offended him too often, and have much to be pardoned. But,

blessed be his holy name, he is not a God of terrors, but of love. He does not surround his throne with the blaze of ineffable majesty, which no man dares approach unto, but with the milder lustre of paternal love, which invites us to come unto him. Is he then our Father? How will this allure the afflicted to open their sorrows to him? How will it invite the distressed to repose all their cares upon him? How will it raise the desponding heart and feeble knees? How will it encourage the self-condemned sinner to hope for his mercy?

Draw near then, with faith, thou child of sin and affliction, to the throne of grace. Thou art, indeed, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief:—yet God is thy friend. Thy sins have taken such hold upon thee, that thou art not able to look up:—yet the Almighty is thy Father. Thou art a rebellious and disobedient child:—yet he gave his Son to die for thee. Flee then to his altar for refuge: yet let thy confidence in his mercy be tempered with reverence of his majesty. It is thy Father, to whom thou art applying for mercy;—but remember, it is thy Father in heaven. Whilst, therefore, his kindness gives thee assurance, let his greatness teach thee humility and obedience.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, Is God a Father? Then his children should behave with respect and reverence before him. The name of parent is a title of love, but it also carries authority with it. The true filial duty, therefore, which we owe to him, is that of fear tempered by love. We should love him as a parent, but fear to offend him as a God. It was the just language of God himself to the Jews, "If I be a parent, where is my honour?" It is, therefore, our first duty to honour God, at all times: but it is still more especially our duty, when we approach his presence in this solemn place. We ought, then, to suffer none of the follies and vanities of the world to occupy our thoughts. We are on our knees before a God; therefore man and his trifling concerns should vanish. Our eyes are raised to the wide expanse of eternity; therefore the petty views of limited time should not engage our notice: we should take up the language of the patriarch of old, "Surely this is none other than the house of "God! Surely this is the gate of heaven!"

Fourthly, Is God our Father? The common parent of all mankind, who made all nations of men of one blood, to dwell upon the face of the earth? How ought this to check every proud and contemptuous thought, when I consider that, however the providence of God may have

made the necessary distinctions of high and low, in the order of human society, yet, when we come into his presence, all distinctions cease, and even the king and the beggar are upon a level before him, who is King of kings, and Lord of lords? Both have the same common wants: both have the same common parent: both have the same common Redeemer: both have the same right to come before the throne of grace: and both have the same common promise of acceptance, if they come before it with pure hearts and hallowed lips.

How, again, will this enlarge our hearts and affections for all the world, who stand in the same common relation with ourselves to the great parent of the world? Will not this teach us to love them, to pray for their welfare, to promote their happiness, to forgive their trespasses, and, even in a foe, to behold a brother? Can I address that God, who is our common supporter, preserver, and redeemer, with partial and narrow thoughts, or wish to monopolize his blessings? Can I address God with pride, which is a contempt of others, who were made by the same hand with myself? Can I approach him with envy, which is maligning those blessings he is pleased to give them? Can I come to him with malice, which is a detestation of those who are children

children of the same God, and heirs of the same hopes? Must I not rather imitate this my heavenly Father, whom I am addressing, who is kind to all, and sendeth his rain upon the just and the unjust? Must I not rather, like him, study to forgive their faults, the common faults of that humanity of which I myself am a partaker; to pity their infirmities, to console their misfortunes, to relieve their necessities? Will it not better become me, when I am on my knees before God, to consider myself as the common intercessor for the whole human race? Will it not better become me, whilst I am begging a blessing upon myself, to cry out, in the pathetic language of Esau, "Hast thou but one blessing, "my Father? Bless them, even them also, O "my Father." Bless the distant savage and barbarous infidel: bless the unbelieving Jew and deluded Turk: bless the whole race of mankind, wheresoever dispersed, or howsoever distressed; wheresoever placed, or howsoever divided, in language, manners, or affections: O Lord, save thy people, and bless thine inheritance; for thou art the same common parent of all: thou art our Father: all the earth doth worship thee, the Father universal and everlasting.

Every man, who rightly considers, will naturally have such thoughts as these. May we so

consider, that we may never begin this divine prayer without them! May we learn from the condescending title of parent, to come boldly to the throne of God's grace; yet, at the same time, let the awe of his majesty fill our souls with reverence. When we take upon us to speak to the Lord, let our words, our thoughts, our gestures, be all expressive of that humility, which becomes sinful dust and ashes. Let no levity or inattention be seen in our countenances, but let this solemn reflection ever be uppermost in our thoughts, that we are addressing a God of infinite majesty, for a blessing upon ourselves, our families, our kingdom, upon the whole race of mankind, for every thing that is dear to us in this life, and every thing that is valuable in a better. And above all, let all our addresses to God be offered up in the name of that Saviour, who, in compassion to our infirmities, taught us how to pray, and through whose merits alone, our prayers can hope to find acceptance at the throne of God, our Father in heaven.

SERMON VII.

LUKE xi. 2.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

IT was always a matter of great uncertainty and perplexity, even in the most enlightened parts of the heathen world, in what way men should address their devotions to the supreme Governor of the universe, under whatever forms they conceived him to exist. Without a guide to direct their footsteps, and without light to refine and illuminate their conceptions, they wandered amidst doubts and shadows; some times raised to the visionary elevations of a blind enthusiasm, at other times sinking into the dark abyss of despair, and, at all times, the sport of every gale of novelty, the prey of every vain phantom of delusion.

In such a state, therefore, we cannot wonder to find them breaking out into the tender language of the prophet of old: "Wherewith shall "I come before the Lord, and bow myself be- "fore the high God?"—earnestly, as it were, calling out for somebody to take them by the hand, and to direct those devotions which they were willing, but knew not how, to direct aright to the throne of God. Nor, for the same reason, can we wonder to find them flying to every species of superstition, which a fearful, or a fanciful imagination dictated. The uncertainty of all expedients, led them to try every expedient. And hence arose that multitude and variety of ritual institutions, sacrifices, and oblations, which overspread the earth;—the infliction of corporal austerities,—the libations from the pure elements,—the rivers of oil,—the blood of slain beasts,—and the more shocking and detestable rites of those, who offered their sons and daughters unto devils, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul. And from this same perplexing uncertainty it was, that the admirable Socrates, who strongly felt and owned the necessity of some superior guide to carry him through the whole of his duty, declared it to his noble pupil Alcibiades, as a matter of the greatest joy and consolation, "that, in due time, a divine person "should come into the world, who, out of his

"care

" care and tender regard to mankind, should
" remove all their doubts, disperse all darkness,
" and fully instruct them how to present their
" prayers and praises and religious offerings, to
" the supreme Being, in a pure and acceptable
" manner."

This remarkable prediction of a wise and good heathen, we have the happiness to have seen fully accomplished, in the person of our divine Master, who came down from heaven to shew us the infallible way thither, and who has taught us to direct all our petitions thither, with full assurance of success, in that admirable form of prayer which he left behind him, as the rule, the pattern, and the ground-work of all our addresses to God. It is, therefore, with great joy and consolation, that every Christian can pray to his Father in heaven; since he is assured, that he speaks in a language acceptable to him, and utters no requests, but such as are fit to be made known unto God.

The first petition we are taught to present to him, is that contained in my text, Hallowed be thy name.

And, indeed, we cannot but remark, that there is a peculiar fitness and propriety in thus beginning

beginning our address to God, with expressing our zeal for his glory and majesty. For if we are, in truth, the children of God, it will be our first duty to consider and promote the advancement of our Father's honour.—Nor would it be decent or becoming to solicit temporal blessings for ourselves, in preference to the veneration of his great and adorable name, from whom those blessings are all derived. The Apostle, therefore, very fitly tells us, "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;" both as being the most decent, and also the most likely way, of obtaining temporal blessings.

After this remark, I shall consider,

First, What is meant by hallowing the name of God; and,

Secondly, What are the sentiments and duties suggested to us, from the use of this petition.

To hallow signifies properly, to separate and set apart, or to regard, as holy.

In the former of these senses, God is said, in scripture, to hallow the sabbath-day; that is, to separate and set it apart as a holy day, peculiarly appropriated to himself, and to the exercise of those

those religious duties which he commanded. And, in the latter sense, men are commanded to hallow the sabbath; that is, to regard and use it as holy, by a strict observation of those holy purposes for which the sabbath was instituted.

And we shall see a very clear necessity for attending to this distinction, if we consider the word as applied to God, or to his creatures. For, as applied to God, it certainly cannot imply a wish, that he may be set apart or made holy, who is in himself essentially holy, and the fountain of all holiness in others: we can only mean by it, to express our own veneration and regard for his sovereign majesty, and essential purity, and our devout wishes, that his transcendent holiness may every where be known, and admired; that all the nations of the world may adore him; and that his name, which is great, wonderful, and holy, may every where be duly reverenced and acknowledged.

As applied to his creatures, whether things or persons, it expresses only a designation and application to religious uses: and, in this sense, the petition will imply our wish, that whatever belongs, or is dedicated, more immediately to God and his service, may be treated with reverence and decency, not as having any intrinsic holiness

holiness in themselves, but for his sake, to whom they belong.

We are taught to request, that the name of God may be thus hallowed.

Now the name of God is used in various senses. Let us see, therefore, what these are.

And 1st, The name of God signifies the true God; whom, by way of eminence, the Jews call the Name. Thus, in scripture, to forget the name of God, is to forsake him, and serve strange gods: to walk in his name, is to worship the one true God, in opposition to idols.

2dly, The name of God signifies his superior excellence and dignity, as possessing, in the highest degree, every natural and moral perfection. Thus God himself proclaims his name by his distinguishing characters of excellence, in the book of Exodus: "And the Lord descended "in the cloud, and stood with him there, and "proclaimed the name of the Lord: The Lord, "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-"suffering, and abundant in goodness and "truth."

And,

And, in this sense, the hallowing his name will be to frame worthy conceptions of his nature and attributes, to adore him in the wonders of his creation and providence, where his several perfections are so signally displayed, and to acknowledge him in both, to be great, wise, wonderful, and holy.

3dly, The name of God signifies his authority, or delegated power. Thus, when the angel was sent to conduct the children of Israel, it is said, "my name is in him," that is, he acts by my authority. And, in the same sense, our Saviour says, "I am come in my Father's name."

And, in this sense, we shall hallow his name, by paying a regard to every duty he has enjoined, by shewing a respect to his laws, and by submitting ourselves to all, who act by his divine authority and appointment.

Lastly, The name of God signifies the appellation by which we express, in common, the Supreme Being, as Jehovah, Lord, or God. And, in this sense, we have the same expression in the third commandment: "Thou shalt not take "the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

Now

Now to hallow the name of God, in this sense, will be, to avoid all light, irreverent, or unnecessary use of it; all profane cursing and swearing, and that still greater profanation of the name of God, which consists in perjury and blasphemy.

Instead of such base practices as these, we should rather endeavour to copy the example of a great and excellent philosopher of our own country, who, from a long contemplation of the wonderful works of divine providence, had wrought in himself so profound a veneration of the great God of heaven and earth, that, for more than twenty years of his life, the very name of God was never mentioned by him, in his common discourse, without a visible pause and stop, expressive of his reverence and devotion *.

And indeed, even the Jews, whom we are apt to hold in much contempt, are so impressed with a veneration for the Deity, that they think it a profanation even to pronounce the word, which they conceive most expressive of the majesty of his divine name.

* Boulton's Life of Boyle, page 21.

Upon

Upon the whole, when we offer up this petition, having a regard to all these several senses, we pray,—that God would dispose us and all mankind to own him, as the one true God;—to give honour to him, as the pure fountain of all perfection;—to love him, as the giver of all good things;—to adore him, as the sovereign Lord of the universe;—to admire him, as the wise disposer of all events;—to fear him, as the tremendous and just Governor, to whom we must give an account of our actions;—whose name ought to fill our souls with reverence, and our lips with praises; a name, which is above every name, holy and reverend, to which, therefore, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on the earth, and things under the earth.

The uses suggested to us from these notions of hallowing the name of God, are these,

1st, That we should endeavour to cultivate in ourselves, and advance in others, just ideas of God; which are not only the basis of all religion, but also of the greatest use in life. For here it well deserves your attention to remark, that all the leading characters of God, which we can either derive from the light of reason, or are delivered to us in scripture, are such as are

not intended to lead our minds to idle and unprofitable speculation, but rather to establish an immediate relation between God and his creatures, and to beget in us a habit of practical virtue, from the consideration of this relation. Thus, if from regarding that excellent wisdom, which shines forth in every part of the visible creation, we are led to consider God as all-wise; that consideration will teach us to bear our lot in life, however lowly or embittered it may be, with patience and resignation, as being the appointment of him who cannot err. If, again, from contemplating that variety of perception and intelligence, which we discover in all the parts of the moral world, we are led to consider God as all-knowing, and extending his providential eye over the whole creation;—that consideration will teach us to demean ourselves with decency, purity, and reverence, as being ever in the presence of our all-seeing judge, who is about our path and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways. Nor will the other attributes of the Deity, if rightly considered, have less influence upon our moral practice in life. His justice will teach us to respect and obey his laws, as not being the mandates of a capricious tyrant, but the decrees of a righteous Governor: nor will his mercy be less efficacious in instructing us to love him, as a kind parent, and to have a steady

a steady trust in him; amidst all the tumultuous waves of life, and distracted wanderings of the soul.

And, whilst these right notions of God are thus useful to us in the common conduct of life, they will be no less useful to us in our religious speculations and opinions: for where the foundation of religious inquiry is once firmly laid, upon the well-grounded basis of a just apprehension of God and his attributes, we shall neither be in danger of falling into the blind errors of superstition, on the one hand, nor the wild phrenzies of enthusiasm, on the other; we shall neither implicitly believe every thing that is offered to us by the credulity of mistaken zeal, nor wantonly reject the clear evidences of revelation, because we cannot comprehend those mysteries, which infinite wisdom has wrapped up in inscrutable darkness: for, whilst our idea of the divine perfections will teach us not to believe every spirit, it will also guard us against denying the spirits that be of God.

Secondly, Having formed in our minds right conceptions of God and his perfections, our next care should be to hallow his name, by a strict and constant attention to the worship of

him, and also by endeavouring to worship him aright.

With regard to the former of these, it is a duty so clearly deducible from our ideas of God; —so consonant, though under different modifications, to the practice of all ages and nations; —so expressly commanded every where in scripture;—and, lastly, so essential to the preservation of a sense of God and religion in the world; —that it would be a mere loss of labour to go about to prove that it is a duty, and a most important one too.

I can only lament,—and, with much sincerity I do lament,—that what is so plain, and reasonable, and important, should be so generally neglected and disregarded;—that neither a respect for the laws of God and man, nor a regard for the welfare of themselves, their children, their servants, and the community in general, all of which are deeply interested in this point, can prevail upon much the greater part of almost every christian parish to pay even a tolerable attention to the divine worship of Almighty God, though they both see and experimentally feel the bitter fruits of that overflowing iniquity, which is, and ever must be, the necessary consequence of a neglect of it.

As

As to the latter duty, that of endeavouring to worship God aright, we cannot have a clearer direction, than that which is given us, in few words, by our divine Master himself:—"God," says he, "is a spirit, and they that worship "him, must worship him in spirit and in "truth;" that is, with unfeigned sincerity, and in a manner suitable to his refined and spiritual nature. We are not, however, vainly to imagine from hence, as the Quietists would idly persuade us, that our intercourse with God either can or must be spiritual alone, abstracted from all corporeal sense: for though God be a spirit, man is not so; he is a compound of spirit and sense, and the feelings of the former cannot be expressed without the organs of the latter. He, therefore, that would worship God aright, must first impress a just and awful sense upon his mind of his majesty and perfections, and then endeavour to express that sense by proper and decent language, accompanied with such postures and gestures as are either productive, or expressive, of humility and devotion;—provided always they are such as do not contradict the established order of public worship, or, by their singularity or excess, interrupt the attention of those who are engaged in the service of the same God with himself.—And here we may justly remark the peculiar happiness of our established

church, which has guarded us against the danger of approaching God in an improper manner, either in our words or gestures, by furnishing us with the excellent language of our liturgy, and by directing, in our ritual, such decent changes of posture as are suitable to the several parts of divine worship in which we are employed; in every part of her public services, keeping equally clear of the crude effusions and ridiculous gesticulations of enthusiasm, and the ostentatious pomp and mummery of papal superstition.

Thirdly, Are we sincere in offering up this petition, it will become us to shew our sincerity by carefully avoiding all profane thoughts and words, all irreverent jesting on things sacred, and by shewing a decent respect to every thing which bears a peculiar relation to the Almighty, —to his word, to his sabbaths, to his sanctuary, and to his ministers.

Nor are these things trifles, however the spirit of a licentious age may deem them so. They are, indeed, the common subjects of merriment in scenes of dissipation and festivity, and he is often thought the brightest wit who can most successfully turn them to ridicule, and, with too many, ridicule is considered as the infallible test of

of truth.—I well know, therefore, the ground on which I stand in attempting to defend them:—I well know the charges of ignorant weakness, or bigotted credulity, which will recoil on the head of every man who attempts to defend them. But it would ill become a minister of the Gospel of truth to be deterred by such arguments from defending truth. Sooner, therefore, shall my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, than either a criminal silence, or a cowardly concession, shall betray the interests of that Master in heaven, whose servant I am, and in whose presence I stand. Nor will I scruple to repeat, even in this age of licentious irreverence, when things sacred and profane are treated with equal contempt, that a just reverence is due from every man, not only to God himself, but also to every thing, which, by his special appointment, bears an immediate relation to his service, such as the time, the place, and the ministers of his worship.

These things are not, indeed, we freely confess, the soul and spirit of religion itself; but they are the necessary guards with which infinite wisdom thought necessary to fence it: and, we may safely say, has done so on the best grounds; for, if these fences be once broken down, the more important parts of religion will soon follow. —God's name despised, will soon lead to a con-

tempt of every duty, religious and civil.—A neglect of his sabbaths would bring on a neglect of God himself: for men are too easily engaged by the pursuits of the world, which bring present profit or pleasure with them: it is, therefore, absolutely necessary to set apart one day, at least, to recall their wandering thoughts from sense to sentiment, from earth to heaven.

Nor are appropriate places of worship less necessary.—God may, indeed, be found in the field or in the desert, the self-commissioned enthusiasts will tell me; who boast of having mountains for their pulpits, and the heavens for their sounding-boards. It is true, the Almighty may be found there; for he fills all space:—"the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness "thereof; the round world, and they that "dwell therein:" but it is no less true, that man, diverted by the various calls of present engagements, would soon forget to seek him there. It is, therefore, highly expedient to have stated and convenient places of worship, where all may have an opportunity of assembling, in which seriousness should be inspired from considering ourselves as in the more immediate presence of the Almighty, and in which we may all join together in acknowledging our dependence on one common God and Father, and our own mutual relation

relation as brethren.—Nor, again, is it less fitting, that these places appropriated to divine worship, should be hallowed by a becoming regard to decency and good order: for, though we want not, we wish not for, the costly and meretricious ornaments of Romish pageantry, yet we should, at least, take care, that nothing should offend the eyes or ears of those who assemble to pay their devotions at the throne of God, or take off from that reverence, which ought ever to be impressed upon our minds, when we enter the house of God. It was the language of Solomon of old, when speaking of the temple he intended to build; "the house "which I build is great; for great is our Lord "above all gods:" and, to the same purpose, David said; "the work is great; for the palace "is not for man, but for the Lord God."—Nor, again, is there less reverence due to those who minister about holy things, whether we consider the relation they bear to God, or the services they are employed in for the benefit of man: and, though they may not always keep up to the dignity of their high and important character; (for we own ourselves men of like passions and infirmities with you, and possess our treasure in earthen vessels;) yet it should, in justice, be remembered, that some respect is always due to the office, if not to the man; that the failures

of individuals should not be extended to the whole order, to the great detriment of religion itself; and, finally, that every man should be cautious of throwing the stone of reproach at them, who is not conscious of being perfect in his own station.

We mean not, however, to offend any man by laying so great a stress upon these things, as some men have incautiously and unwarrantably done: a pharisaic severity in them, on the one hand, is as much to be avoided as an indecent levity on the other: for, though we think it expedient, in the language of the Apostle, "that "every thing should be done decently and in "order;" yet we wish not to see religion reduced to mere forms and outward observances; these should be considered as the means and helps to religion, but not as religion itself. Our first care, therefore, should be to hallow our hearts and lips, by a sincere love of God, and a deep sense of his goodness: and I will venture to say, that, where these are found, a just reverence for the things pertaining to God will never be wanting.

Lastly, We should, above all, shew our sincerity in making this petition, by endeavouring to

to hallow the name of God by the purity and uprightness of our conversation; for this is the best proof we can give of our reverence of God. The uplifted eye and bended knee, whilst they implore, with seeming fervency, that the great name of God may be hallowed, may be joined with a heart hypocritical and regardless of his glory: but a life directed in obedience to the commands of God; a zeal that shews itself in good actions; a faith that worketh by love; these speak a language which cannot either be suspected or mistaken. And, whilst they declare our own reverence for God, they will also stir up others, by the power of shining example, to hallow his holy name, and be a means of extending the blessed kingdom of God, which in the next petition of our Lord's prayer, we are taught to request may come.

Let, therefore, every one of you, that nameth the name of God, depart from iniquity; and may your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and by them be induced to glorify the name of our one great common Father in heaven; and, that after a life of holiness spent upon earth, ye may be qualified for the society of saints and angels, of the assembly of the first-born, of Jesus, the mediator

of

of the new covenant, and of that God, the great judge of all, whose name is great, and cannot worthily be praised, who is more to be feared than all gods.

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

LUKE xi. 2.

Thy kingdom come.

IN the preceding petition of this holy prayer, we are taught to pray, that the name of God may be hallowed and glorified. In these words, therefore, we proceed to request, that such steps and methods may be pursued, as are most likely to advance that glory. And this end cannot better be answered, than by the coming of God's kingdom.

But what then are we to understand, here, by this kingdom of God?

This I shall endeavour first to explain, by considering the various senses, in which this phrase is used in scripture; and, secondly, I shall

shall lay before you such observations as arise from the nature of the petition.

And first, The kingdom of God is expressive of his universal dominion over nature:—That, as the Creator of the world, he ruleth over all;—he is King of kings, and Lord of lords;—there is no end of his greatness.

But it cannot be the design of our wishes, in this petition, that this kingdom of God should come: for, we know, it is ever present, and hath been established ever since the world began. All things obey his directing power: animate and inanimate nature alike feel his controlling hand, and is compelled to submit to the laws of his universal kingdom. Fire and hail, snow and vapours, wind and storm, fulfil his word: the pillars of heaven tremble at his reproof: and even man himself, the petty tyrant of the lower world, is but as the dust of the balance in his sight: "for he doth according to his will in the "army of heaven, and among the inhabitants "of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or "say unto him, what doest thou?"

But, though we cannot, with propriety, pray, that this universal kingdom of God over nature may

may come, which, in the conclusion of the prayer, we acknowledge to be for ever and ever; yet we may justly rejoice, that it is actually present; that we are not left to the guidance of blind chance or unrelenting fate, but are the subjects of a wise and just Governor, who orders all things in number, weight, and measure. "The Lord is King: the earth may be glad "thereof; yea, the multitude of the isles may "be glad thereof."

Secondly, The kingdom of God is expressive of his dominion as the moral governor of the world. And this is not a dominion over senseless matter, or unintellectual beings; but it is a more noble one, over rational creatures,—over the children of his care.—It is that universal dominion over nations and people, which the Psalmist so finely expresses in various places: "The Lord is King, be the people never so "impatient; he sitteth between the Cherubim, "be the earth never so unquiet. All the ends "of the world shall remember and turn unto "the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations "shall worship before him: for the kingdom is "the Lord's, and he is the governor among the "nations."

And

And if we look into the exercise of this dominion, we shall find it ever worthy of God. His laws are not the mandates of an arbitrary or capricious tyrant; but they are wise, and just, and good.

And this dominion over man is also founded in, and agreeable to, the constitution of man: God acts upon his reason, his conscience, and by the impulses of his Spirit; yet he leaves him finally to chuse for himself, whether he will submit to the divine laws, or not. Man, therefore, though he is bound both by duty and interest to obey, yet, as being a free agent, it is in his power to disobey, and to oppose the kingdom of his wise governor.

And to what nation or people shall we go, where this has not been the case? If we look back to the very infancy of the world, we see this kingdom of God opposed by the disobedience of his first subjects. And if we carry our view through the succeeding ages, what scenes of horror present themselves to our eyes! See here the scientific Egyptian amidst all his stores of knowledge, prostrating the image of God before four-footed beasts and creeping things!—See there the proud philosopher of Greece, amidst

amidst all his boasted refinements, falling down to stocks and stones, the representatives of his fabulous and unknown gods!—See here, again, martial Rome, boasting of her thirty thousand deities, within her imperial walls, and yet ignorant of the one true God!—and, to compleat the picture, behold there the bloody devotees of Moloch, sacrificing their sons and their daughters to devils!

Nor were the manners of antient nations less corrupt, than their worship was base and impure. For see here the fierce barbarians of the north, more savage than the beasts they pursued, and lost to every sense of human feeling!—there the voluptuous and effeminate millions of Asia, sunk in vice and sloth, and regardless of every noble and rational object!—Here the tyrants of mankind, ruling the subjects of the same common God with a rod of iron! and there the proud conqueror, panting for universal empire, and marking his passage through remote nations, in characters of rapine, violence, and blood!

It is true that God, in pity to mankind, preserved some traces of his kingdom in one corner of the world, among a people peculiarly his: and yet even they too soon lost sight of those miraculous interpositions, by which they had so often been

been rescued, and fell into all the gross corruptions of idolatrous worship and immoral practice; so that, though the moral kingdom of God was still visible, it was visible only in its ruins; it exhibited to the view nothing but some disjointed and shattered remains of that beautiful structure, which he originally founded.

Thirdly, To recall men, therefore, to their obedience, and to restore the moral government of the world, a new kingdom was established, under the Messias, founded on clearer information than that of reason, and strengthened by the additional sanction of a full discovery of a future state of rewards and punishments; and which, in due time, should bring all men to an acknowledgment of the truth, and to a state of perfect allegiance to the one true God.

This kingdom was but as yet in its infancy, when our blessed Saviour instructed his disciples in this divine formulary, and therefore he had just reason to teach them to pray, that the kingdom of God and his Son (which is here comprehended in one expression) might come, and that all nations might acknowledge his divine mission, and be converted to the purity of the Christian faith. It was, therefore, clearly, the primary intention of this petition to request, that

the

the boundaries of God's kingdom might be enlarged every where, by an outward profession of the Christian religion, and by an inward conformity to its holy precepts.

And much cause have we still to continue the use of this petition, if we consider, how imperfectly the glorious things, which are spoken of this kingdom, are yet fulfilled in the world.

It was expressly predicted, that the Gospel of Christ should be preached to all the world;—that all kings shall fall down before him, and all nations do him service;—that his name shall be great, from the rising up of the sun to the going down of the same;—that the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea;—and, above all, that the whole nation of the Jews shall be converted to Christianity, and become one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Yet look into the world, and see how little all this is fulfilled—Cast your eyes over the wide-extended empires of Asia, or through the uncivilized tribes of African, or American, or insular savages:—how many millions yet sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and have never so much as heard of the name of Jesus, but are still

falling down before stocks and stones, the work of mens' hands? How many, again, have so blended the purity of the Christian faith with the base alloy of Mahometan imposture, as to have lost the name of Christians? How many, in this age of growing licentiousness, have cast off their former faith, and become worse than infidels? And, what is more deserving of consideration than all the rest, how signally does the whole body of the Jews still remain out of the pale of the Christian church?—though, amidst all the revolutions of empires, and changes of nations; though scattered, as they are, into all lands; they still continue a separate and unmixed people, retain their original faith, name, and language; as if they were incapable of that civil amalgamation, by which we daily see men of all nations, by frequent intercourse, reduced, as it were, into one homogeneous mass; and this, clearly, for some remarkable designation and purpose of providence, to be fulfilled in its due time.

We cannot but see then, that Christ's kingdom is not yet fully come, nor the glorious things, which were predicted of its extent and universality, yet accomplished: yet let us not despair of the accomplishment of them. Man is a creature of a day, but God is the rock of ages:

ages: he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; his promises, therefore, cannot fail. The prophetic kingdom of the Messias, we own, is not yet established, yet this wished-for time of universal peace and good-will, will one day come: it is in the hands of an unerring providence, which will bring it to pass in due season. And, in the mean time, it is our duty to co-operate with God's gracious design; to pray earnestly, that his kingdom may come in its full extent, and that all nations may acknowledge the kingdom of God and his Son, to whom he hath not yet been spoken.

If, again, we consider this kingdom of God, as intended to bring men into the obedience of faith, and to produce in them the fruits of righteousness, how much cause have we still to pray earnestly, that the kingdom of God may come: for, even among those, upon whom his name is called, how few acknowledge sincerely the dominion of Christ? Among his subjects, how few obey his laws? Look into the Christian world, and where is that purity which Christ taught? Where is that justice which he commanded? Where is that universal love which he recommended? If we meet with some few instances of this obedience,—and few, indeed, I fear, they are,—their blessed effects will dispose

us to wish, that this obedience were universal, and that all would own the kingdom of their Lord by a conformity to his commands.

The prophets again, call this kingdom of the Messias, a kingdom of peace. But where, alas! shall we find this prophecy accomplished? Have nations yet beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks? Where is that happy region to be found, so invitingly described by the prophet Isaiah, where the wolf dwelleth with the lamb, and the leopard lieth down with the kid? Where, rather, is not man a foe to man, and the image of God stained with cruelty and blood-shed? Surely, therefore, every friend to mankind must devoutly wish, that this blessed state of peace may begin, and this kingdom of God come.

Fourthly, There is also a kingdom of God, which is a kingdom of glory.

And this is, in the most perfect and exalted sense, his kingdom:—it is that kingdom which shall have no end:—it is that kingdom, which shall commence at that awful period, when, death and sin being vanquished, Christ shall come in his glory, to put an end to the generations of men, and to give to every man according to

to his work: "to them, who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil; of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile."

And with respect to this sense, we, therefore, here pray, that God would hasten his eternal kingdom;—that, this life of sin and sorrow being ended, we, with all those that are departed out of this life in the true faith and fear of God, may reign for ever in glory.

Having thus explained the various senses, in which the kingdom of God is used in scripture;

1st, As meaning God's absolute dominion over nature;

2dly, His moral kingdom, in the government of mankind;

3dly, The kingdom of the Messias; as established either in the outward profession of the Gospel, or in the inward purity and obedience of its professors; and,

Lastly, His future kingdom of glory, when death shall be swallowed up in victory, and pain and sorrow shall be no more:

I now come to the consideration of those duties, which are suggested to us from the use of this petition.

And now then, if we are sincere in praying that God's kingdom may come, we should remember,

1st, That it is our duty to endeavour to advance it, by shewing ourselves good subjects, by obeying the laws of our divine Sovereign, and by promoting his honour.—For it is not enough to wish; we are also to act. We should, therefore, both live in obedience ourselves, and also, in our several stations, instruct the ignorant, reprove the licentious, exhort the careless;—and this more especially among those, who are committed to our care by the providence of God, or over whom our authority or example are likely to have a prevailing influence.

And, indeed, this is not only the best proof we can give of our sincerity in making this petition, but is also the most likely method of bringing it to pass. For, as the holy lives of the first professors

fessors of Christianity, contributed above all things to the success of the kingdom of Christ, so there is no cause, which has so much contributed to obstruct it, as the careless and immoral lives of Christians. And so it ever must be: for in vain will the mouth proclaim the purity of the Gospel precepts, if our actions speak the language of Spanish rapine and barbarity, or in the sanguinary tone of Romish vindiction and inquisitorial cruelty.

2dly, If we are sincere in making this petition, it will become us to shew our sincerity by co-operating with the providence of God and the labours of pious men, in spreading the kingdom of Christ. There are yet many dark corners of the world, where the light of the Gospel has never shone. There are many nations, where reason has lost her empire over the passions. And many there are, even where Christ has been preached, in which little is known of real Christianity, through those manifold corruptions and superstitions, which have been blended with it. Here then is a wide field, in which we may act. Here we may truly shew our zeal for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, by joining our prayers and our liberality to the pious endeavours of those, who are now labouring to give

light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

3dly, Do we pray in earnest, that Christ's kingdom on earth may come, let us remember, that one especial part of it is peace and universal love. Instead, therefore, of dividing the unity of his kingdom by needless contentions, or bitter strife and envying, it will better become us to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. We are taught here to pray for the kingdom of Christ in general, without any distinction of sect or party: wherever, therefore, his name is sincerely professed, all denominations of Christians have a right to an interest in our prayers; and, though we may lament, that some should cause, what may appear to us, needless divisions, yet we are to treat them with tenderness and charity; hoping, that though they may be, in our opinion, in some things mistaken, yet, that we have all the same common interest and object in view, and wishing, that at the end of our journey, however we may have pursued different roads, or even sometimes have fallen out by the way, we may finally all meet together, in Christ's eternal kingdom of glory.

4thly,

4thly, Do we pray in earnest, and therefore sincerely believe, that God's kingdom will come; —let this teach us to bear with patience, the common evils and misfortunes of the world.

We know, that sorrow is the natural lot and birth-right of man, and, therefore, we can have no claim to be exempted from it, even under the most perfect establishment of human affairs. But we know likewise, that the kingdom of God is not yet come, either in its full purity or extent, and, therefore, we must expect to find the natural sorrows incident to our state, much increased by the frauds and villanies of a corrupt and unregenerate world. From this petition, however, we may learn, both to be prepared for them, and also to be comforted under them. For he, who taught us to pray, that his kingdom may come, plainly, thereby, tells us, that the sinful, turbulent, and selfish passions of men are not yet subdued, and therefore, will continue to produce their natural effects, in disturbing the happiness and order of the world. But then we are hereby also taught to remember, that there will be a future kingdom of glory, in which all our present toils and grievances will be amply compensated, and therefore that we ought to bear them with patience and moderation.

Lastly,

Lastly, If we pray in earnest, that God's kingdom of glory may come, we should also take care to prepare for its coming: for, without preparation, who may abide its coming? "Seeing "that ye look for such things," says St. Peter, that is, the coming of the great day of God, "what manner of persons ought ye to be in all "holiness and godly conversation?" Nor let us deceive ourselves in the nature of that preparation, which is necessary to fit us for the coming of this great and terrible day. It is not the feeble effort of a dying hour; it is not the prayers of the man of God; it is not the late-deferred remembrance of a Redeemer's death; which will fitly prepare us for the coming of Christ's kingdom. These may, indeed, chear the natural horrors of our last scene, and contribute to make us depart in peace, in the eye of the world:—but the best, and only safe preparation, is a life of virtue, joined to an active faith. The kingdom of God must be within us;—must begin in the heart, and shew itself in righteousness, and true holiness;—without which, all external acts and professions, all our attendance upon divine ordinances, will avail us nothing.

If then we hope to be joined to saints and angels in glory;—if we hope to be re-united to those friends, whom, for a time, we have lost;—

we

we must follow their virtues, and imitate their perfections; and then the kingdom of God will come to our joy.

But, to use the awful language of the prophet, "Woe unto you that desire the day of the "Lord without preparing for its coming! To "what end is it for you? The day of the Lord "is darkness and not light." For, if we are corrupt and vicious;—if we have the name of Christ, without any of his graces;—we have no interest in his kingdom:—nay, happy would it be for us, if that kingdom might never come! —For it will only come to our sorrow and confusion:—it will only come to expose our folly before men and angels:—it will only come, to sentence us to be the companions of the worm that never dieth, and the fire that cannot be quenched.

I shall conclude the whole with our Saviour's awful description of the beginning of his future kingdom of glory, which contains in it more forcible incentives to a serious preparation for its coming, than any which the feeble voice of man can suggest; and to which, therefore, I shall not add any thing but my warmest wishes and entreaties, that it may receive that attention from

from your ears, and make that impression upon your hearts, which it so well deserves.

" When the Son of man shall come in his " glory, and all the holy angels with him, then " shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: " and before him shall be gathered all nations: " and he shall separate them one from another, " as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the " goats: and he shall set his sheep on the " right-hand, but the goats on the left. Then " shall the King say unto them on his right- " hand, Come, ye blessed children of my Fa- " ther, inherit the kingdom prepared for you " from the foundation of the world: for I was " an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was " thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a " stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye " cloathed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; " I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then " shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, " when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee; " or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw " we thee a stranger, and took thee in, or " naked and cloathed thee? Or when saw " we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto " thee? And the King shall answer and say unto " them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye

" have

" have done it unto one of the least of these my " brethren, ye have done it unto me."

" Then shall he say also unto them on the left- " hand," (mark well the tremendous words, ye whose sins are leading you on to this unhappy number) " Depart from me, ye cursed, into " everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his " angels: for I was an hungred, and ye gave " me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me " no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me " not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, " and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then " shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, " when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a " stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and " did not minister unto thee? Then shall he " answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, " inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of " these, ye did it not to me. And these shall " go away into everlasting punishment, but the " righteous into life eternal."

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

SERMON IX.

MATTHEW vi. 9.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

I KNOW not whether it may be thought worth the while to remark, that, in strictness of modern language, this petition should be translated, "Thy will be done on earth, as it "is in heaven:" as also the first petition should be, "Our Father, who art in heaven." I must, however, do so much justice to the translators of our bible, as to say, that they expressed themselves, in both petitions, agreeably to the mode of the times in which they wrote. For there can be no doubt, that "in earth" is a common expression in our older English writers, and the authority of the best grammarians will support me in saying, that the relative pronoun "which," though now used in relation to things only, was formerly used in relation both to persons and things.

But,

But, leaving these minutiæ of verbal criticism, to those who delight in such barren disquisitions, let us proceed to examine what is more important, the sense and substance of the petition before us.

I have already observed, that the several parts of this divine prayer have a manifest and well arranged connection with each other. Thus, in the first petition, we pray, that the name of God may be hallowed, and that whatever belongs to him and his service may be treated with decency and respect. In the second, we pray, that his kingdom may come, and that his religion may become universal. But how could this be, if his will also was not to be done? How could he be a king, if no obedience were to be paid by his subjects? With great propriety, therefore, we here pray, that his will may be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

My present business shall be to shew,

First, What this will of God is:

Secondly, What is the measure of our obedience to it: and,

Thirdly, The reasonableness of doing it.

First,

First, The will of God signifies his providential power, by which he governs the world. And this will is, in some sort, always done. All nature hears his voice, and is obedient. "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he, in heaven, and in earth, and in the seas, and in all deep places." Private events and public revolutions are all conducted by his design and order. And even those who will not do, are yet compelled to suffer his divine will. The sceptic ridicules a divine providence, and the fool says in his heart, there is no God: but both the one and the other are forced to yield to that controlling hand of omnipotence, which guides and directs the several component parts of the great machine of the universe.

We cannot, therefore, pray, that this will of God may be done: for it cannot be resisted. But we may pray, that we may chearfully acquiesce in it, and submit to our destiny; that in all the changes and chances of life, we may acknowledge and adore his resistless will, who ruleth over all.

Secondly, The will of God more especially here means that law of obedience, which he has prescribed to rational and free agents, as the guide of their conduct. This law was originally

contained in the clear dictates of reason and conscience; which are, therefore, called in scripture "the law written in their hearts;" and, "the light that enlightens every man that "cometh into the world." But alas! this natural light soon became dim and obscure. The corrupt passions of mankind, the power of prejudice, and the prevalence of error soon conspired together, either wholly to eradicate the first principles of duty and virtue, or, at least, to leave no traces of their efficacy in regulating the actions and conduct of the greater part of the world.

God, therefore, after having preserved a knowledge of his will among one peculiar people, for the space of fifteen hundred years, by a particular revelation, at length graciously condescended to make it known in a more full and general way, by the revelation of his Son, whom he sent into the world for this very purpose, that all men might come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved. We Christians, therefore, well know the will of God. It is laid down in the Gospel, in terms so clear and express, that he that runs may read it. But though the will of God is easily known by us, it is not so easily practised, amidst the infirmities of a corrupt nature, and the temptations of a dangerous world.

world. We are, therefore, here taught to pray, both for strength to obey it ourselves, and also that others may do the same.

But secondly, We are not only to do the will of God, but the measure and manner of our obedience is also here prescribed to us, when we pray, that the will of God may be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

By which expression * some have thought, that our Saviour allúdes to the steady, regular, and uniform motion of the heavenly bodies, which God hath established for ever and ever, and given them a law, which shall not be broken: and that man should be as punctual and conformable in his obedience to the will of God, as the moon, which is appointed for certain seasons, and the sun, which knoweth his going down. And, indeed, it must be owned, the regular order and succession of that host of heaven, which God hath ordained, may but too well serve to reproach the disorder and irregularity of man, the only rebel of the created world; who should be the noblest of God's works, as being made in his own image, and yet, in his actions, is too often sunk below the very brute that perisheth.

* Vide Grotii comm. in loc.

I should rather, however, chuse to understand the words of this petition as alluding to the ready and chearful obedience of the angels in heaven, which is a fit pattern for man to imitate on earth.

How they obey, indeed, we are no where particularly and expressly informed in scripture. But, from the characters under which they are there described, we shall find no great difficulty in collecting what is the nature of their obedience. Thus, they are described, as being able "to discern what is good and bad:" they have, therefore, a perfect knowledge of God's will. They are represented, as excelling in strength: their obedience, therefore, is active and vigorous. They are called his ministers, a flame of fire: their obedience, therefore, is pure and fervent. They are his messengers and heralds, that do his commandments, and hearken to the voice of his word: their obedience, therefore, is ready and chearful. These then are the qualities, which man is to copy in his obedience to the divine will, and which are peculiarly the subject of this part of the petition. And much need he has to pray, that God would enable him more and more to resemble those divine spirits, in the discharge of his duty.

The

The angels of God, we see, excel in knowledge: but man is blind, and seeth few things aright. We have need, therefore, in the first place, to beg of God the assistance of his Holy Spirit, to direct us to the knowledge of his will, and to lead us into all truth.

2dly, Man, again, is weak; but the angels of God are strong. We are, therefore, to beg of God to strengthen our infirmity, and to give us grace to imitate the sacred ministers of heaven, in a lively and active obedience to his will.

3dly, Again, the ministers of God are as a flame of fire; purged from all dross and impurity, and, therefore, ready and fervent in discharging the will of their divine Master, without any alloy or mixture of imperfection. But man is encompassed with stubborn affections, and the corruptible body presseth down the soul. His best services, therefore, are imperfect, and the struggles of the flesh against the spirit will always counteract his most pious resolutions. We have need, therefore, to pray earnestly, that we may have the pure and refined fervour of angels, in performing the will of God, and in keeping ourselves undefiled.

4thly, Once more. Man grows weary and sluggish in his duty, and, too often, performs it with sturdy reluctance, or cold indifference: but the angels of God are ever on the wing to execute the commands of their great Sovereign, and rejoice to do his pleasure. This will teach us, therefore, to pray, that we may resemble their zeal, that we may run the way of God's commandments, and do his will, with the same joy and alacrity, with which they do it.

5thly, The angels of God perform his will from a principle of real obedience, and therefore perform it universally. They have no corrupt will of their own to mislead them; they have no sinister views or oblique considerations to warp their judgments; they have no end in view but to obey, because it is God that commands. But where, alas! shall we find this universality and simplicity of obedience in man? Wavering and unsteady in our principles, we know not how to act aright, and whilst in some things we obey the will of God, in others we are all of us the servants of a very different master. And even in what we seem to do aright, how little proceeds from a real principle of obedience, abstracted from those worldly considerations of interest, prudence, or ostentation, which too often are the foundation of the most shining actions

tions of mankind. We have need, therefore, to pray to that God, who searcheth the hearts of men, not only that we may do his will, but also do it on those principles of pure and sincere obedience, on which alone we can hope to be rewarded for doing it.

6thly, The will of God is done by all the angels in heaven: for those unhappy spirits, which kept not their first estate, have long left that celestial habitation, once their own, and are now reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day. There is, therefore, an universal subjection to the will of God, in heaven. But where, alas! shall we find this universal subjection and obedience to his will, on earth? Nay, rather, where is not that will universally disobeyed, by open infidelity, or profaneness, by secret sin or avowed rebellion? I fear, even the best of us may take shame to ourselves on this account, and may recollect many sad instances, in which we have opposed the will of God, by acting contrary to his laws, by subverting the empire of reason, by refusing to listen to the admonitions of conscience, and by quenching the Holy Spirit within us. We, therefore, here pray, both for ourselves and others; that we may all have grace to obey the will of God; that the whole race of man-

kind may become true and faithful subjects to their great Sovereign, and do his will as universally, as it is done by all his angels and saints in heaven.

Lastly, The will of God is done, in heaven, with the profoundest reverence and humility. The celestial messengers are described in scripture, as being thousands and ten times ten thousand in number, and enlightening the earth with their glory: yet so great is their veneration of the Deity, that they presume not to look up to him, but are represented in the majestic vision of Isaiah, as covering their faces with their wings, unable to behold the brightness of his majesty. If then these glorious and intelligent courtiers, who have no sins or infirmities to cover their faces with confusion, perform their Maker's will with such deep humility, with what infinite reverence, with what profundity of adoration, should his sinful creatures on earth obey his commands, when they consider the immense disparity between a God of omnipotence and a worm of mortality; between a being of infinite purity and a wretched compound of sinful dust and ashes! This then is the subject of our prayer; these the measures of our obedience. And much reason have we, if we rightly consider, to pray earnestly, that God would so strengthen

strengthen our weakness, that we may truly do his blessed will on earth, even as it is done in heaven.

For, thirdly, As no duty is more necessary, than that of doing the will of God, so also none is more reasonable.

1. God made the world, therefore, surely, has the best right to govern it. Shall man, then, dare to invade this right? Shall the thing formed defy him that formed it? Shall dust and ashes presume to oppose Omnipotence?

2. Again: God is thy supporter and preserver: in him thou livest, movest, and hast thy being. Does it not become thee, then, to obey him on whom thou dependest? Does it not become thee to tremble at his will, who is able to recall the blessings he gave, and to make thee, in a single moment, the same lifeless, breathless dust, from which thou wast originally taken?

3. God is thy benefactor. He has showered down his blessings upon thee with an unsparing hand, and given thee all things richly to enjoy: He has commanded the sun to cheer and enlighten thee, the breezes to refresh thee, the former and the latter rain to descend in their

seasc-,

season, for thy use: and, what is above all, He has redeemed thee from sin and death, and opened to thy view the gate of immortality. Wouldest thou, then, reject these blessings, or despise that will, which is hourly employed for thy benefit?

4. Remember that the will of God is thy only security. Man is blind and ignorant, and hardly seeth a few things aright: he knoweth not what to ask for himself, nor how to guide his steps amidst the dark mazes of the world. It is surely, therefore, the greatest of blessings, that the Almighty condescends, as it were, to take thee by the hand, and to guide thee by his will; —that thou art secure in his wisdom, and strong in his power. And who, then, but a madman would throw off the reins of divine government, when he knows that he is incapable of governing himself? Who would prefer the dark glimmerings of his own feeble understanding, to the bright effulgence of heavenly wisdom?

5. This duty recommends itself to thee by its advantages. For the man who knows that he is doing the will of God, must unavoidably be happy in every state and circumstance of life. This is a thought, which will make his religion easy, his duty pleasant, his afflictions light, and his

his heart always chearful: for he knows, whether he abounds or suffers need, whether the world smiles or frowns upon him, that both the one and the other are the will of God, and are alike directed by that almighty hand, which holds men and kingdoms, as it were, in a balance:—he is, therefore, resigned, contented, happy.

But compare now with such a man the bold railer against providence,—the fool, who hath said in his heart, there is no God:—how different, how dreadfully different, is his situation! If he acts virtuously, he has no joy in reflecting, that he is doing the will, and therefore deserving the approbation, of a gracious master in heaven. If he prospers, he has no comfort in thinking that his success is the reward and favour of a just God: he can only attribute it to blind chance, which scatters her undistinguished bounties at random. And if he is unsuccessful, he has no source of comfort; he may rail, indeed, at fate or providence, but he cannot help himself; he must submit to, though he will not acknowledge, the uncontrollable mandates of Omnipotence.

How much better, therefore, is it to submit chearfully, and to do that just and kind will of God, which no power can evade, and which alone

alone can secure and establish the happiness of man!

If then, my brethren, you are sincere in making this petition, let your sincerity appear in your lives and conversation. Every day and every hour will furnish you with opportunities of shewing your obedience and submission to the divine will. Ye cannot plead ignorance what or where it is:—it is before you and around you.

His written will is in the Gospel, which is plain, and not to be mistaken, and extends itself to every action of your lives. And his providential will is no less clear and intelligible. We feel it every day of our lives.—Am I in sickness or poverty? it is the will of God.—Am I envied or despised? it is the will of God.—Have I lost a friend or a fortune? it is God's will.—Am I bereaved of children, or robbed of my good name? it is the will of the same just God, who knows what is best and most fitting for me.

In these, therefore, and all other events, ours should be the language of old Eli;—"it is the "Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." And though, at first, we may find some difficulty in bringing the stubbornness of flesh and blood to this resigned temper, yet let us not be discouraged.

couraged. Submission in small things will pave the way to it in greater: and we may rest assured, that time and perseverance will confirm what piety has begun; for the tree, which is constantly bent, however stubborn by nature, will become flexible and pliant at the last.

And should we want any example to animate us in the discharge of this duty, we need but look up to him, who was the Author and Finisher of our faith.—The same Jesus, who taught us to pray, that the will of God may be done on earth, was himself also the noblest example of doing it. In the midst of agonies unsupportable,—within sight of that cross, which was to terminate his life in pain and ignominy,—his language was only this, "Not my will, "but thine be done."

Let not man, then, plead the impossibility of doing the will of God. His divine Master was content to do it in the worst of circumstances, and to be made perfect through sufferings. Let not, therefore, the servant expect to be above his Lord:—let him rather think it his highest honour to be as his Lord; to be as ready and chearful in his obedience, as humble and contented in doing the will of his Father, which is in heaven.

When,

When, then, we look up to the Author and Finisher of our faith, we shall learn patience and submission to our heavenly Master. And when we consider those glorious spirits, who minister in his presence, and fall down before him with never-ceasing hallelujahs, it will warm our devotions with a heavenly flame, it will teach us to purify our hearts and affections, and to cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart, in all events; that after having done the will of God on earth, we may join that angelic chorus in heaven, which ceaseth not, day or night, to worship him that liveth for ever and ever, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive "glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast "created all things, and for thy pleasure they "are, and were created."

SERMON X.

MATT. vi. 11.

Give us this day our daily bread.

HAVING, in the former part of this divine prayer, expressed our wishes for promoting the honour of God, the establishment of his kingdom, and the performance of his will, on earth; we now proceed to ask of him a supply for our own necessities, both of body and soul.

The former of these is contained in the petition now read to you, "Give us this day," or, as St. Luke expresses it, "Give us, day by day, "our daily bread:"—a petition seemingly very plain and obvious, and which yet has been the subject of much controversy among the learned.

I shall,

I shall, therefore, first endeavour briefly to explain the precise meaning of the words; and, secondly, to shew, what important lessons of duty we are taught by offering up this petition to God.

First, then, By bread we are here to understand whatever is necessary for the preservation and comfort of our being. It is emphatically called in scripture, "the staff of life;" and the sacred writers express all the horrors of want and dereliction, by breaking the staff of bread. When, therefore, we ask bread of God, we ask of him whatever is necessary for our temporal happiness, agreeably to the station and rank we hold in life.

Indeed some of the ancient Christians extended the sense of this petition still farther, as containing a request for the supply of our spiritual wants, especially in the participation of the sacramental elements, which they considered as the bread of life, and which, from their receiving it daily, they called "their daily "bread."

But we shall easily see, that there is no just foundation for this refined and mystical explanation, if we consider that it was impossible for our

our Saviour to teach his disciples to pray for that sacramental bread of life, of which they had then never heard, and of which no mention ever appears to have been made, till the institution of the Sacrament, in the night preceding his suffering.

Secondly, We are here taught to pray for our daily bread.

The original word ἐπιούσιον, which we translate "daily," has been taken in a variety of senses.

1st. The African fathers, who understood this petition as relating to spiritual food, endeavoured to countenance their opinion by translating it "super-substantial," or "extraordinary." But as their opinion had no foundation in truth, so it is equally certain, that this interpretation of the word is altogether contrary to the usage and analogy of the Greek language.

2dly, Others, having a view to the composition of the original Greek word, conclude it to mean the bread necessary for our subsistence, or, in the language of Agur, "the food that is "convenient for us." And it must be owned, that this translation is agreeable enough to the

sense of the petition, but not so to the idiom of the Greek language, which, according to this interpretation, would necessarily require us to read ἐπιόσιον, instead of ἐπιούσιον*.

3dly, Others, with more propriety, translate it "the bread of to-morrow;" that is, either of the next succeeding day only, or, as St. Jerome thinks, of the whole remainder of our lives. I should, however, chuse to adhere to the former of these two senses, and to understand the petition simply as a request to God, that he would give us, this day, bread sufficient for to-morrow; in order that we may be free from that μεριμνα, or anxious thought, for the morrow, which our Saviour forbade, as inconsistent with the faith and duty of a Christian.

But, leaving these minutiæ of critical observation, let us proceed to what is much more important, that is, the consideration of those useful lessons, which this petition ought to suggest to every man who repeats it.

And 1st. It ought to teach us a grateful acknowledgment of the kindness and bounty of divine providence. The God that made the world

* Vid. Schmidii not. in Matt. vi. 11.

has

has stored it with a variety of blessings, for our comfort and pleasure. He has commanded his sun to chear us in the day-time, and the moon to give her light in the night season:—He maketh the clouds drop fatness, and the grass to grow upon the mountains, and herb for the use of man:—He arrays the lilies of the field in more than royal splendor, to administer to our delight:—wherever we turn our eyes, united beauty and convenience, the gifts of a kind providence, meet us, and conspire to fill the heart with joy and gladness. With how much gratitude, therefore, should we venerate that invisible hand, which feeds and supports us! With what love and filial homage should we regard that indulgent Father in heaven, who condescends to supply our daily wants with daily bread.

2dly, This petition ought to teach every one who uses it, a firm trust and dependence upon God. We have been left unto him ever since we were born; he was our hope, from the time we hanged upon our mother's breasts to the present hour; and he hath not yet forsaken us. Our past experience, therefore, should beget in us a patient reliance upon his bounty, even in our greatest distresses: for, what though the clouds may lour, and the storms of adversity blow hard upon us; "although," in the beau-

tiful language of scripture, "the fig-tree shall "not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; "though the labour of the olive shall fail, and "the field shall yield no meat; though the "flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there "shall be no herd in the stall; yet will I re-"joice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of "my salvation." We are in the hands of a just and powerful God, who is able to dispel the darkness that hovers over us, and to restore peace and plenty to our afflicted souls. He has taught us to pray for our daily bread, and he would never teach us to pray for what he did not intend to grant. He is our Father in heaven, and, therefore, if his children ask bread, he will not give them a stone.

The fear of want is, indeed, natural to all, and is wisely implanted in our breast. But it is the intention of this fear, not to lead us to a distrust of providence, but to guard against the danger of poverty, by a cautious foresight and honest industry. If, therefore, we are afraid of being reduced to want, even daily bread, we should redouble our prayers to God, and our own endeavours against it, but patiently leave the event to him, who feedeth the young ravens that call upon him.

And

And truly, if we consider the common course of human affairs, there is little reason to fear the evils of real poverty, if we are not wanting to ourselves. There are, indeed, too many who feel them: but, I am afraid, if we trace back their misfortunes to their proper source, we shall much oftener find them the effects of indiscretion or idleness, than either the desertion of God's providence, or the neglect of man: for God's blessing, which is never wanting where it is deserved, added to a chearful industry, will seldom fail to produce a competent share at least of the necessaries of life.

If, indeed, men will call themselves poor and deserted, because they want the luxuries and superfluities of life, they may easily fancy that the kindness of providence does not correspond to their own wishes. But such persons ought to be told, that what they call poverty is no real evil. The purposes of society must ever require a subordination in rank and fortune, and that some should abound, whilst others, comparatively, suffer need. But so long as they have food to eat and raiment to put on, suitable to their humble station, they have all they ought to require,—they have all their Saviour had upon earth,—they have all he taught them to pray for to their Father in heaven. For,

3dly, We should remember, that all we are here taught to pray for, is our daily bread. Had God commanded us, any where, to pray for the delicacies or luxuries of life, we might have thought ourselves hardly dealt with, if we had not obtained them: but, he who best knows what is useful for us, has taught us to pray only for the necessaries of life, reserving to himself the distribution of his farther blessings to every man severally as he pleaseth.

It is, however, certain, that what we call necessaries of life, will ever vary according to the rank and situation a man holds in it. Every man, therefore, who uses this petition, may lawfully be supposed to request of God such a supply and competency, as is suited to his station: for the same God, who has appointed different ranks in life, can never have made it unlawful to ask such things as are necessary to support those ranks. It is not, therefore, unlawful to request such a share of riches, or credit, or honour, as are suited to our condition, provided it is our design to apply them always to their proper uses; that is, to promote the glory of God, and the welfare of mankind. Some men, indeed, talk of the plainness and simplicity of the Gospel, as utterly incompatible with every thing beyond what mere necessity requires. But, when

when I turn my eyes towards the splendor of that civil and religious polity, which God himself established among the Jews; when I farther consider the liberal and enlarged genius of the Gospel; I cannot prevail upon myself to believe, that it was ever the intention of its divine Author, to contract the bounds of Christian liberty into so narrow a compass. Expressions there may be in the apostolic writings, which have the sound of inflexible severity in this point. But surely it would be the height of madness to extend cautions or precepts, derived from rigorous necessity, and directed to the disciples of Christ when under a state of persecution, to Christians in very different circumstances; or to argue from Christianity in an infant and oppressed state, to Christianity when arrived at full maturity, and secured by the fences of national establishment. On the contrary, if we allow that God foresaw that kings should one day become its nursing fathers, and queens it nursing mothers, we must, at the same time, allow, that he has no where disapproved of those innocent, though not essential, ornaments, which have, in all ages, been the constant appendages of royalty.

4thly, When we consider that weakness and inability of our nature, which brings us upon our knees day by day, to ask of God a daily support,

it ought to teach the proudest heart a lesson of deep humility. For surely, when I reflect that I am, every day and hour, the pensioner of heaven's bounty; when I consider, that the same God, who to-day gives fruitful showers, and blesses the increase of our land, can to-morrow, as it is expressed in scripture, "make the heaven "that is over our head to be brass, and the "earth that is under us, iron;" I cannot but be sensible, how poor and helpless a creature I am: —I cannot but be sensible, how weak and foolish are all the pretensions of supercilious pride and vaunting ambition;—I cannot but be sensible of the truth of that ancient remark, that man, in his best estate, is altogether vanity. So long, then, as thou art forced, day by day, to ask bread of thy God, think not highly of thyself, nor despise thy poor brother, who, however low in thy esteem, is upon a level with thyself before the throne of God, in making this petition. Nor, on the other hand, can the poor have a greater consolation to their sufferings, nor a stronger motive to their frequenting the house of God, than to reflect, that they are here on a level with the greatest of mankind; and that a time is shortly coming, when they may be ranked, not only with the highest of mortal men, but even with angels and archangels.

5thly,

5thly, Whilst we implore of God a supply of daily bread to ourselves, let us learn to commiserate and relieve the distresses of our afflicted brethren. God has various ways of conveying his blessings and bounty to mankind:—to some they descend in rain and fruitful showers, which make the vallies to laugh and sing:—to others they are conveyed in prosperous gales, which bring the long-expected vessel into the haven where she should be. But many, alas! are doomed to receive their daily bread from the hand of human benevolence. The man, therefore, who withholds from the poor that relief, which heaven wisely designed them to receive through his hands, is unfaithful to his trust, and contradicts the intention of providence, which certainly meant, that the abundance of the rich should be a supply, I do not say for the profligate vagrant or sturdy beggar, but for the honest and industrious, but unfortunate and distressed poor and needy. And surely we shall appear with an ill grace before the throne of God to request farther blessings from him, if our conscience tells us, that we have been guilty of misapplying those we have already received;—if the cries of the fatherless and widow bear witness against us, that we have neither fed the hungry, nor cloathed the naked. And many, I fear, indeed, there are, who stand in need of this relief: for though,

though, as I before observed, the lazy and the vicious constitute the bulk of those, who labour under the evils of poverty; yet, when we consider the common accidents of life, to which thousands are daily exposed; when we reflect upon the unavoidable misfortunes incident to every profession, we cannot wonder to find, in a wide-extended world, too many deserving objects, who call for our protection and assistance.

Whilst, then, we kneel to God for our daily bread, let it touch our hearts to reflect, that there are many, who are as much the children of God as ourselves, who in earnest want a morsel of bread. Let us not, therefore, grudge them the crumbs which fall from our tables, the small and scanty superfluities of our abundance. Let us not think it much to have spared one article of superfluous ornament or luxury, or to have been absent from one place of expensive diversion, for the sake of having it in our power to have relieved a poor member of Jesus Christ. Let us now and then retire from the circles of extravagant and voluptuous gaiety, to converse with the more wretched part of our species,—the melancholy inhabitants of hospitals and cottages, the unsheltered guests of cold streets, the unpitied prey of famine and disease.

They

They will not, indeed, entertain our eyes with the magic of theatric representation, or delight our ears with the syren voice of melody; but they will teach our hearts a lesson of invaluable wisdom;—they will teach us to remember what wretched beings we are, when left to ourselves, and how much we are indebted to that providence, which has placed us above the stings of want and the miseries of dependence, by supplying our daily necessities with daily bread.

Lastly, Whilst we ask of God, day by day, our daily bread, let it admonish us of the uncertainty of life, and of every thing we possess in it, and, therefore, of the necessity of attaining that bread of life, which he that eateth shall never hunger. Our Saviour no where teaches us to take thought, that is, I mean, anxious thought, for the morrow. He well knew, that we are but creatures of a day, and that the present moment is all we can call our own: He, therefore, thought it sufficient for us to ask for present support, leaving futurity to the disposal of him, who governs the changes and chances of life. It will become us, therefore, to live daily in a sense of our uncertain condition, to form no distant schemes of pleasure or ambition; but rather, whilst it is yet in our power, to prepare for that great and awful change which awaits us,—knowing

ing that the tenure of life, like the supply of our bodily wants, is but from day to day.

Whilst, then, we bend the knee to God for that daily bread, which is the necessary support of our frail and feeble bodies, for a few years, let us remember also to request that nobler spiritual food, which is necessary for the comfort of our souls, through ages as unlimited as their own existence; that when the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come, it may not find us unprepared; but that, having done the will of God on earth; having bid adieu to all those wants and infirmities, which now bring us, day by day, to ask our bread of God; we may be received into those mansions of glory, where the cry of sorrow and the cravings of hunger are not heard;—where all tears are wiped from all faces;—and where that God, who is now hidden from us in impenetrable darkness, will condescend to admit us to the fullness of joy in his presence for evermore.

SERMON XI.

MATT. vi. 12.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.

THIS is a petition, which requires no particular explanation. Every man knows the nature of forgiveness,—every man knows that it is his duty to forgive,—every Christian knows, if he believes the scriptures, that his own salvation depends upon it. The only difficulty is, to bend our stubborn hearts and unchristian tempers to the practice of what we all well understand.

Instead, therefore, of wasting your time by unnecessary inquiries into the nature of forgiveness, I shall directly apply myself to lay before you the unreasonableness and guilt of revenge, and to answer such objections as are sometimes

times urged to palliate or justify this diabolical passion.

You will, however, just permit me to remark, that this is the only petition of the Lord's Prayer, which was not taken by our Saviour from the antient Jewish liturgies, and, therefore, may be considered as containing a doctrine truly christian, as being the peculiar language of him, who came down from heaven to give peace on earth, and who taught us, both by precept and example, to pray for our enemies, and to bless them that persecute us.

And first then, Let it be considered, that the breach of this law of forgiveness is highly injurious to God. Vindictive justice is an act of sovereign authority, which God alone has a right to exercise: he, therefore, that takes it to himself, invades his prerogative in the highest instance. "To me belongeth vengeance and recompence," says God: and who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? We think it reasonable, that an earthly sovereign should forbid his subjects to inflict punishment upon one another, and command them to refer all their quarrels and disputes to proper judges and fixed laws: now God has reserved the same right to himself, over high and low, rich and poor, who

are all equally his subjects: the revengeful man, therefore, by disobeying this law, invades the right of omnipotence, and is unjust and contumacious to his Maker.

Secondly, The revengeful man is unjust to his neighbour; and that whether we consider the cause or the effects of his revenge. For as to the cause;—what is it, in general, that kindles this irreconcileable hatred in his breast? His neighbour, perhaps, has discovered his fraud and injustice; or will not comply with what he thinks unreasonable; or does not pay him that respect, which he thinks due to his fancied importance or increasing wealth; or refuses to grant him some favour, which he has no right to demand:—in any of these cases, his anger presently boils over, and he becomes his enemy, and seeks his ruin, without either sufficient cause or justice.

And the case is the same, if we consider the effects of his revenge. For, in the first place, men seldom observe the proportion that ought to be between the punishment and the offence. They are ready to stand up for the law of retaliation, and cry an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; not considering, that these words, in the Jewish law, related to him that gave the offence,

offence, to restrain the violence of his passion, by setting before him the dangerous consequences of his violence, which would draw down upon himself the same injury which he offered to others, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and not to encourage a spirit of revenge in him that received the injury. Again; it seldom happens, that men observe the rules of justice in pursuing their revenge, but think every thing lawful against an enemy. Thus, to satiate their thirst of vengeance, they are often guilty of lying and defamation, and sometimes will not scruple to build their revenge upon the basis of perjury and false witness; so that a man's reputation, and even life itself are in danger, through the violence of this truly diabolical passion.

Thirdly, The revengeful man is unjust to himself: for, by not forgiving others, he deprives himself of the common right of being forgiven himself: and no man's life is so blameless, as not to stand in need of forgiveness, at some time or other. God has commanded us to love one another with the same affection that we love him: he hath told us, "that if we bring our "gift to the altar, and there remember that "our brother hath ought against us, we must "leave our gift before the altar, first be recon-

"ciled

" ciled to our brother, and then come and offer " our gift:" which plainly implies, that we are not fit to enter the house of God, or tread his courts,—that we are not capable of serving God acceptably, so long as we harbour any thoughts of revenge in our breasts,—and that we cannot obtain mercy from God, unless we first shew mercy to men.

And wisely was this condition enjoined us by the decree of God. He knows our unwillingness to forbear and to forgive: he stands, therefore, as a barrier between us, to compose our animosities, and restrain our revenge:—he has made our forgiving others the indispensable condition of receiving his forgiveness; that the fear of eternal vengeance might restrain those, whom the milder ties of tenderness and humanity could not restrain. Highly, therefore, must he be unjust to himself, who by persuing his revenge, forfeits all title to forgiveness from man, and to mercy from God.

It has, indeed, sometimes been objected, that he that forgives one injury, invites his adversary to do him another. But we every day find the contrary true by experience. A mild and forgiving spirit will win over our bitterest enemies: it disarms their rage and disables their

malice, which, like the winged lightning of heaven, acts only with violence, where it meets with resistance. But injuries revenged beget implacable and hereditary hatreds, which, like the fire of hell, which kindles them, are never quenched.

Again, it is often said, that to forgive discovers meanness and baseness of spirit, but revenge is a sign of magnanimity and greatness of soul. But this false and destructive maxim can proceed from nothing but from a most ungovernable spirit of pride, or such an unsatiable thirst of doing mischief, as puts us upon a level with wild beasts, and, if followed, would make men worse monsters than howl in the savage deserts. Even the very heathens had more exalted notions of humanity, and taught their disciples, that to forgive injuries was an indispensible moral duty, incumbent upon every man. "We ought not to return an injury, nor to do "any damage, or mischief, to any person in "the world, whatsoever we may have suffered "by him," said the divine Socrates, in a temper and language truly Christian. And I appeal to every man's own experience, whether his heart does not secretly approve and applaud every instance of a meek and forgiving temper in others, and whether his conscience does not,

in

in the silent hours of cool reflection, condemn every revengeful thought in himself, as base, barbarous, unmanly, and unchristian.

But some may say, if they forgive, men will impute it to cowardice, and not to religion; and therefore their honour is concerned. But what is this phantom of honour, which thus keeps the world in awe? Are men then obliged to sacrifice their reason, their conscience, their hopes of immortality, to popular opinion? Is not the only true honour in acting like men, and like Christians? Is it not far better to suffer the reproaches of foolish men, than the torments of hell? Besides, do these men, who pretend to such nicety of honour in this point, take care to keep their honour inviolable upon all other occasions?—Honour requires us to be true and just in all our dealings, faithful in our promises, to abstain from acts of fraud, injustice, and oppression, and to do to others as we would they should do to us. Yet the man of honour seldom troubles himself about these weightier matters of the law; though they are, in reality, the only things which constitute true honour. He cannot bear a lie to himself, yet he will affront his God with ten thousand oaths. He cannot pass by a reproach from any man,

yet he will defraud many by refusing to pay his just and honest debts. He cannot forgive the slightest injury, yet he will do the greatest. His honour will not let him bear a frown or a jest, but it will let him seduce the wife of his dearest friend, plunge a sword into the heart of the man whom he has injured, and leave an innocent and often distressed family, to bewail the diabolical effects of revenge and ungoverned passions. Such is that honour, which tramples upon the wisdom of the gospel, and would teach men to reverse that amiable precept, "even "as Christ forgave you, so also do ye!" He, therefore, who regulates his actions by the opinions of men of such honour as this,—who can condescend to purchase their approbation at the price of his own innocence,—who dares to prefer their decrees to the commands of the universal Sovereign,—will have little reason to applaud his wisdom, when he awakes to serious reflection, and still less, when he awakes to those judgments which are reserved for the implacable and unforgiving.

But some will tell me, perhaps, it is a hard task to forgive. But let me ask, in return, if it be not a harder still to revenge; by which nothing is gained but loss of quiet, and a mind continually

continually racked with hatred, cruelty, envy, and all those diabolical passions, which add to the torments of hell itself?

And here I might naturally attempt to paint the character of a heart thus torn and distracted with the implacable desire of revenge:—but, here, in speaking to those who have long been witnesses to the tenor of my conduct in life, I hope, it will be no affectation or breach of modesty to say, that I find myself unequal to the task:—for sure I am, that none can paint it to the life, but those, who have actually felt it. It would not be too much to say, that hell is begun within them: for they burn, day and night, with a consuming fire. The image of the person they persecute stares them in the face, like an evil genius, and haunts them in their closest recesses and midnight hours. If their enemy prospers, who can express their rage? If men shew him respect, how great is their indignation? If he is promoted to honour, how outrageous is their envy? Thus a thousand contending passions are hourly working in the breast of the revengeful man, which by turns afflict and distress his soul, yet the wretch, like a slave condemned to the galleys, still drags his chain, and, after a thousand times the pains to accomplish his revenge, which it would have

cost him to forgive his offended brother, he at last cries out, that it is too hard for flesh and blood to forgive. And, indeed, justly he might so cry out, had God annexed half the miseries and anxieties to the duty of forgiveness, which the revengeful man feels in accomplishing his savage and unchristian purposes!

But you will say, that the desire of revenge is not to be resisted, as being the strongest of all human passions. But surely it is not stronger than the love of heaven and eternal happiness. Even should we allow that God has commanded us hard things, yet we should also remember, that he has promised us great ones. Let, therefore, the recompence of the reward atone for any fancied difficulty in the discharge of our duty. Let us remember too, that the forgiveness of others is the condition of our own forgiveness, and the difficulty of this duty will appear still lighter. Doubtless, our own life has not been without its spots and blemishes, which call for vengeance from God at least, if not from man; can it, therefore, be hard to be told,—forgive and ye shall be forgiven;—pardon your enemies, and your sins shall be pardoned in heaven, be they never so great and many? Is there not rather, if I may be allowed the expression, music in the sound, which ought to fill our souls with

gratitude

gratitude to God, for providing so easy a method of obtaining his favour?

If, therefore, any man be under the lashes of his conscience, he has here a sure mark of his acceptance with God: if, in the midst of his penitential tears, he can lay his hand upon his heart, and with sincerity say, I forgive those who have injured me, for the sake of that Saviour who forgave me, he may rest assured, that his pardon is sealed before God. But, on the contrary, if he retains any malice or hatred in his heart, though in the language of the prophet, "his eyes were tears, and his head a fountain of "waters," they would not suffice to wash away his sins. For Christ hath expressly told us, "if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither "will your heavenly Father forgive you your "trespasses." Nay, the more strongly to enforce the necessity of performing this duty, he hath even obliged us to condemn ourselves in the face of heaven, if we do not forgive our brother: "forgive us, heavenly Father, as we "forgive others:" that is, forgive me, O my Father, as I forgive my offending brethren: extend the same compassion to me, which I shew to them: pardon my infinite transgressions against thee, my God, as I pardon the frailties of my offending fellow-creatures against myself.

It is on this condition only I can look for thy favour; it is on this condition only I can hope to die in peace; it is on this condition only I can hope to find mercy in that awful hour, when I shall most stand in need of mercy.

And surely, in such a request as this we cannot be cold or insensible. It is a wish that must lie near the heart of every man, that God would pardon his manifold transgressions and infirmities. For, whatever be our situation in life; however we may live in the sunshine of fortune, or in the smiles of the world, we cannot be happy without a sense of God's forgiveness: guilt is ever anxious and trembling: it leaves a load in our breasts, which no smiles of fortune can remove, and which will continue to press us down with misery to the very end of our days, if we have not something to fly to for relief. And this relief is to be found from God alone, on the condition of forgiving our enemies. For, if we forgive not men their trespasses, neither will our heavenly Father forgive ours.

But, perhaps, the example of God may prevail upon us more than his precepts. If, therefore, we want farther motives to persuade us to forgiveness, let us behold our Redeemer dying upon the cross. If ever any man had a right to revenge,

venge, it was certainly Jesus Christ. He suffered the greatest indignities; he was despised, buffeted, scourged, nailed to a cross between two thieves; had gall given him to drink; was loaded with curses and reviled with insults. And all this he suffered, though he was perfectly innocent in word and deed;—though he was the Son of God;—though he came into the world to redeem those very persecutors. And yet he cries, "Father, forgive them." He does not say, O thou righteous judge of quick and dead, avenger of oppressed innocence, revenge my cause;—but, Father forgive them:—pardon their perjury, calumny, malice, and false witness:—Father, forgive this ungrateful people, whom I preferred before all nations;—forgive Judas, who betrayed me;—forgive the Pharisees, who delivered me up;—Herod, who mocked me;—the false witnesses, who accused me;—Pilate, who condemned me;—and the very murderers, who nailed me to the cross;—Father, forgive them all; for they know not what they do.

This was the way that the Son of God revenged his death; even by praying for his murderers. And doth not his example speak to us in the most forcible language,—"even as I forgave, so "also do ye." Shall Christ forgive his very murderers, and shall we scruple to forgive our brethren?

brethren? Shall the Creator pardon the insults of the creature he had formed, and shall man be wroth with man? Shall God forgive us the immense sum of our sins, and shall we refuse to forgive one another the smallest matters? Shall an angry word, an affront, a neglect, a blow, provoke us to thirst for the blood or ruin of a fellow-creature? Shall a difference of opinion, a jest, a slight, or an imaginary or petty trespass, incite us to harass the fortunes, or mangle the reputation of a neighbour, which is dearer to him than life? No: God forgave us for the sake of his Son, and let us forgive one another for the sake of God. Let us follow our Redeemer's command of loving one another, and his example of forgiving our bitterest enemies.

Lastly, if after this, we can want any farther arguments, for forgiveness and reconciliation, let us well consider, how vain and foolish all our angry and implacable thoughts will one day appear, even to ourselves. Can we forget that the present life soon draws to an end? That soon will all our joys and cares, our friendships and hatreds, our rival hopes and jealous fears, give way to prospects of a very different kind? And when this period arrives, little distant perhaps from some of us, and certainly not far distant from all,—when we lie down on that bed of mortality,

mortality, from which we shall never rise till the trump of the archangel awakes us,—which of us will not then wish to say, which of us can forbear to say; I am now going to bid a last farewell to a vain and tiresome world: I am now taking a last leave of my fellow-travellers, through a painful and laborious journey:—I may, perhaps, have fallen out with them by the way: some of them, perhaps, have treated me with less kindness than I could have wished, and others have embittered my past days with more enmity and unkindness than I think I deserved. But I am now going, whither the hand that injured, or the head that over-reached, can never more approach to hurt me. And shall I then carry my resentments into the other world? Whilst I myself am mortal, shall I make my weak passions and frailties immortal? Will this recommend me to a God of mercy? Will this plead for me at the throne of mercy? No: let me rather forget all those little grievances, which sprung from men, vain and frail like myself:—let me rather pity and forgive those various unruly passions, which they are left behind to struggle with, and congratulate my own good fortune, that I am arrived at the end of my journey,—that I am now laying down a frail and wretched existence, which has too long exposed me to the assaults of ungovern-

ungovernable affections, and made me a prey to devouring passions.

These are thoughts which all of us will one day certainly entertain. What, therefore, we shall then in vain wish to have done, let us now do, whilst it is yet in our power. If there be any root of bitterness among us, let us root it up. —If any trespass, offence, or injury, have for a time warmed our temper, and inflamed our resentment, yet let them not always dwell upon our minds:—there is a time to forgive, as well as to resent:—therefore, in the beautiful language of scripture, let "not the sun go down upon our "wrath," lest we should not rise to-morrow, to have it in our power to be reconciled to our brother. Let us heartily and in earnest take up the fervent prayer of our Litany, "May it please "thee, O God, to forgive our enemies, perse- "cutors, and slanderers, and to turn their "hearts!" And, as we hope to be forgiven ourselves at the last great day, let each of us lay his hand upon his heart, and with sincerity add, "Son of God, we beseech thee to hear us!"

SERMON XII.

MATT. vi. 12.

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.

I HAVE already, in part, considered the nature and tendency of this petition; perhaps sufficiently to convince every dispassionate hearer of the reasonableness and necessity of forgiving injuries: I cannot, however, yet take a final leave of the subject; partly, on account of its importance, but more especially, through a desire to curb and restrain that impetuous and implacable spirit of revenge, which is so opposite to the whole tenor of the Gospel, and so destructive of the peace and harmony of civil society.

To enforce, therefore, the doctrine contained in this petition of the Lord's Prayer, still farther, I shall consider first, what the duty of forgiveness

ness requires from us; and, scecondly, suggest some rules and considerations, which may be of use in restraining the violence of our resentments.

And 1st, The duty of forgiveness undoubtedly requires, that we do not seek revenge, or return those injuries upon our adversary, which he hath done to us. For, if we are commanded in the Gospel to be reconciled to our adversary, it is sufficiently clear, that we are thereby forbidden all practices towards him, which are inconsistent with peace and affection. And this is the express doctrine of our Saviour himself, in words which cannot be mistaken: "But I say unto "you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever "shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to "him the other also."—So patient must the servant of the Lord be to all men; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing.

And we must further remark here, that in the estimation of these things, we must not follow the dictates of our own pride or passion, which account nothing little, but magnify every indignity into an unpardonable fault. These will be ready to whisper to us, that every trespass deserves a prosecution, and every reproachful word a stab:

a stab: but in these cases, neither pride, nor the foolish opinions of honour and gallantry should be our counsellors:—these we solemnly renounced at our baptism, when we were made Christians: they must either, therefore, be subdued by us, or we break our compact with God, and therefore forfeit the benefit of the christian covenant.

2dly, In christian reconciliation it is farther required, that we forgive him that hath injured us, from our hearts, without retaining any secret grudge against him, or any wish to return injury for injury. The providence of God hath given us such natures, and placed us in such circumstances in life, that we have not only daily opportunities, but also the strongest engagements, to shew mutual kindness and good-will.—We are all made of one stock: we resemble each other in the features and proportions of our bodies: we stand in need of each other's help: we make voluntary contracts, and enter into the bonds of civil society, of which love is the heart. And, upon these natural tendencies to mutual good-will, our Saviour hath superinduced the stronger obligation of the christian law, which teacheth us to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us: so that not only all re-

taliation of injuries is expressly forbidden, but we are not even to wish our enemy harm, to cherish revengeful passions against him in our heart, to curse him secretly, or to triumph and rejoice at those calamities which befal him in the world.

3dly, It is farther required, that we recompense good to our offending brother, if he stand in need of our assistance and charity. It is not enough to forbear the return of injuries, but we are obliged also, by the laws of Christianity, to exercise zeal and positive acts of mercy towards him; to feed him, if he be hungry; to clothe him, if he be naked; to comfort him, if he be dejected and in affliction.

But perhaps you will say,—he needs no such assistance,—his condition in life is prosperous,—or his malice is such, that he is not to be mollified by any thing I can do. If so, the sin lies at his own door; his blood shall be required, bnt thou hast delivered thy soul. Still, however, there is one way left, whereby thou mayest prevail over his obstinacy, and do him good in spite of himself: thy prayers are in thine own power; he cannot refuse the assistance of them; he cannot defeat that charity thou shewest for him in this way. To that heaven, then, which

is

is always open to the addresses of the faithful, send up thy prayers for him, that the wickedness of his heart may be forgiven, and that he may be endued from above with a spirit of peace and charity. And surely he must be little of a Christian indeed, who cannot thus recommend the bitterest enemy he has in the world, to the divine mercy.

But how far, you will say, must this duty of forgiveness extend? Does the obligation lie all on one side? Must I forgive, though my adversary makes no steps towards a reconciliation, or even continues to add injury to injury?

To these questions let our Saviour give the proper answer, in his reply to Peter, who made the same sort of inquiry, how often he should continue to forgive his brother: "I say not "unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy "times seven;" clearly implying, that no transgressions of our brother, however frequent or aggravated, should exclude him from our charity, or place him beyond the bounds of reconciliation. But still it will be said, is not this hard and unreasonable? Does it not contradict the strongest inclinations of human nature?—I answer, it contradicts the corrupt passions of human nature, but not that impartial light of

reason, which ought to be the guide of our conduct: for surely it is more agreeable to reason, to be meek and gentle, than to be violent and implacable; to make peace, rather than sow division; to lift up, rather than cast down to pity and conceal, rather than expose and avenge the infirmities of men like ourselves.

But, if we still think there is any hardship in the duty of forgiveness, let us weigh well the example of Him who enjoined it, and who requires nothing of us, but what he practised himself in the highest degree. Can we think of his great condescension in coming down from heaven, and conversing with sinners in the most meek and affable manner;—of his astonishing love and boundless compassion to his murderers;—his patient submitting to all the sorrows and miseries of an afflicted life;—his enduring all the contradictions, affronts, and reproaches of enraged malice;—can we think of these things, and suffer ourselves to be proud and haughty, uncharitable and cruel; to be overcome with passion, to be transported with fury, to be actuated by a revengeful and intolerant spirit?

Consider farther the difference between the meek and gentle Christian, and those unhappy men, who are ever devoured with turbulent and impla-

implacable passions. They enjoy, indeed, the same mercies and providences in common with other men, but they have not the same blessing and effect upon them:—they do not smooth their tempers or mollify their hearts; they do not raise any devout and grateful sense of that goodness, which is bestowed upon them: like the beasts of the forest, they "rise early in the "morning, and seek after their prey, and in the "evening lie them down in their dens: but "they regard not the works of the Lord, nor "consider the operations of his hands." But to the meek and gentle, whose hearts are not soured by malevolence, every occurrence of Providence, every mercy of heaven, yields a new argument of gratitude and happiness. In the morning, they rise from their beds, full of devotion and thanksgiving to God, and of charity and good-will to men; and in the evening, the sun goeth not down upon their wrath:—their hearts are as benignant and unconfined as his beams:—they see God in every providence of the day, and love their fellow-creatures in every thought of their breasts; and, therefore, the night covers them with its shades, secure and unruffled, cheerful and happy.

And now, then, let any revengeful man lay his hand upon his heart, and ask himself,

whether it is not as much his interest as his duty to forgive, even if the present life only were concerned in it. But the comfort of the present life is not all that is at stake: God prefers this christian and charitable disposition of spirit before all outward acts of devotion; and, therefore, the man who wants it can have no claim or expectation of the divine favour.—"I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," is the language of heaven: and we may observe, that both the Old and New Testament are more frequent and exact in stating the mutual offices of good-will and charity from man to man, than in the outward expressions of our devotions towards God. And God himself seldom reproaches the Jews for the want of these; but the defects of the other fill the law and the prophets. And our Saviour, in like manner, proportions the fates of men at the last day, to their observance or neglect of the duty of forgiveness.

It is, therefore, the practice of this duty, which gives us the greatest confidence in the mercies of God, that he will hear our prayers, and accept our persons.—"Go thy way, first "be reconciled to thy brother, and then come "and offer thy gift;" then, and then only, will both thy gift and thy repentance be accepted. And to the same purport is the reasoning of God,

God, where he hath been reproving the Jews for their vain oblations, their new moons and sabbaths, telling them that all these were ineffectual, because their hands were full of the blood of revenge.

But though this christian temper be always thus necessary to recommend us to God, yet we, as Christians, should remember, that we have a peculiar obligation to forgive, as often as we approach the table of the Lord, to commemorate the mercy of a dying Redeemer. It is the wedding garment required by God in scripture; it is the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. If we are, therefore, in earnest in commemorating the death of our best friend and benefactor, we cannot but feel the strongest obligations upon our souls, to put on, as the elect children of God, bowels of mercy, kindness, meekness, long-suffering, forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave us. If, then, we have formerly been so unhappy as to forget this great example of mercy and forgiveness; if we have been guilty of any injury or malevolence to our neighbour; if we have wronged him in his estate, if we have wounded him in his good name, if we have wished ill to him in our heart; let us make haste

to be reconciled to him, before the sun go down, lest the darkness of night overtake us, when we cannot work the work of reconciliation.

And now, unable to add stronger arguments than those which I have laid before you, or to give greater force to so many weighty considerations, I can only add supplication to argument; that is, my intreaty to you and my prayers to God, that what has been said may have such influence as to make it effectual upon your practice and conversation in life. Certain it is, that it is the great, the particular, the indispensable law of Christianity; and, therefore, it is some wonder to me, that men who are commendably attentive to other duties of religion, should lay so little stress upon this: that they should not reflect, how much they daily owe to the mercy of heaven, and what need themselves have of favour and pardon: that, though the offences of man against them are many, yet their own against God are infinitely more: that in the one case, it is but the offence of man against man, between whom there is no essential difference; but in the other, it is the offence of the creature against the Creator; of a worm of mortality against Omnipotence; of the criminal against his judge: for God is a righteous judge, strong and patient, and yet he is provoked every day.

I shall

I shall leave the whole of what has been said upon your minds, with those excellent words of the Son of Syrach, which should always be remembered as a proper comment upon this petition of the Lord's Prayer:—"Forgive thy "neighbour the hurt that he hath done thee, "so shall thy sins also be forgiven thee, when "thou prayest. One man beareth hatred "against another, and doth he seek pardon "from the Lord? He sheweth no mercy to a "man like himself, and doth he ask forgive-"ness of his own sins from God? If he that is "but flesh, nourish hatred, who shall intreat "for his sins?"—Who shall intreat for his sins, at that awful day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and when every man's private malice or disguised hatred shall be naked and open to Him, who shall sit on the throne of judgment, to reward every man according to his works?

SERMON XIII.

MATT. vi. 13.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

HAVING, in the last petition of this divine prayer, requested of God the forgiveness of our past sins, we now proceed to ask of him to guard us against future temptations. A request truly interesting to every one, who has either rightly weighed the imbecility of his own nature, or the manifold dangers, with which he is surrounded in life!

I shall first consider the nature of this petition; and secondly point out those affections of mind, with which we ought to make it.

Temptation

Temptation signifies either a trial of our strength, for the improvement of our virtue, or an allurement to sin.

In the former of these senses, God himself is said to tempt men; *i. e.* to call them to some hard and severe conflict in their spiritual warfare; that their virtue, being tried like gold in the furnace, may shine forth with redoubled and increasing splendor. It was thus he tempted Abraham to sacrifice his only son. It was thus he proved the children of Israel in the wilderness, to try their obedience, and to know what was in their heart. And, for this reason, we are commanded in the Gospel "not to think it "strange concerning the fiery trial that is to "try us;" but rather to glory in tribulations, and to count it all joy, when we fall into divers temptations; knowing that the trying of our faith worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.

But, however glorious these temptations may be, when overcome, we have all of us just reason to wish not to be led into them. How Abraham behaved under so great a trial as fell to his lot, the scriptures tell us; but how we should behave, he only knows, from whom no secrets are hid. Yet, when we consider the weakness of our

our faith, and the natural imbecility of our nature, we have just reason to fear, that even the best of us would but ill receive the affecting language of God to Abraham, "take now thy "son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, and "offer him up for a burnt-offering." Since then we cannot be certain of the event of these great trials, it becomes us to pray earnestly to God, that he would not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear.

2dly, Temptation here particularly signifies allurement to evil.

Now, in this sense, God cannot be properly said to tempt us: for he tempts no man to evil. Yet, since nothing can happen without his permissive providence, we find even this kind of temptation, figuratively, ascribed to God in scripture; and we therefore here pray to him, that he would keep us from the hour of temptation; that he would not leave us to ourselves; that he would not suffer us to be led into those snares, which may endanger our virtue. And this we have just reason to pray for, if we rightly consider our situation in life: for danger is around us, within us, and in every form.

If

If we confide in our own hearts, they are deceitful above all things. Like base cowards or faithless allies, on the first attack, they throw away their arms, and surrender at discretion to the enemy of our souls.

If we think to fly from the danger, where shall we find a place or situation in life that is not full of temptation? Are we in the sunshine of fortune surrounded with its gilded titles and honours? How liable are we to grow giddy with eminence, and to forget God or ourselves? Are we surrounded with the gaieties of life, and neither want ability nor inclination to enjoy them? How likely are we to fall an early sacrifice to riot and dissipation, or, if we escape this, to drag on a miserable existence, burthened with the follies and guilt of youth? If we are sunk in the vale of poverty, and surrounded with distress, how great is the temptation to murmur against God, or to invade our neighbour's property? Do we retire from the world, sick of its vanities, vexations, and deceits? We may by so doing avoid the dangers of example and multitude, but we are not safe from the corrosions of malevolence, spleen, and discontent; we may have our passions to contend with, even in the retirement of the cloister, or the solitude of the closet; —though we fly the guilty haunts of public resort,

sort, yet the tempter can follow us into the cell or the wilderness.

Every age, too, as well as every state, has its peculiar temptations. For the young and thoughtless, there is a world of pleasure, dressed up in syren smiles to allure and captivate.—To maturer age, the paths of honour and the wide-extended field of ambition are open.—For the old, wealth has its charms, which, instead of being impaired in their influences, gain strength by time, and, too often, become at length irresistible.

Since, then, life is ever thus full of dangers, and nature ever prone to fall a victim to temptation, we have just reason to pray, as we do in the words following, that God would deliver us from evil; that is, either from the evil of sin, which is the consequence of being overcome by temptation; or from the evil one, that is, the devil, who is ever ready to tempt and devour us; or, as it is well expressed in the catechism of our church, "that he would deliver us from all sin, "and wickedness, from our ghostly enemy, "and from everlasting death;" always remembering, that however willing the spirit may be to resist temptation, yet the flesh is too often weak and yielding, unguarded and defenceless.

The

The affections of mind with which we ought to make this petition to God, are briefly these,

1st, Whilst we pray that God would not lead us, or suffer us to be led, into the danger of temptation, we should endeavour ourselves, by every art of prudence and circumspection, to avoid temptation, or else we pray in vain. It was the language of our Redeemer himself, on another occasion, "watch and pray, that ye "enter not into temptation:" and it is a language we must listen to and obey on all occasions, if we wish in earnest to avoid the sins, which so easily beset us.

2dly, It is a proof of our prudence, as well as of our sincerity, in making this petition, not to court danger or invite temptation. Every man knows the quarter from which his danger arises, and the feelings of his own heart will tell him, where he is vulnerable. Here, therefore, he is to place the shield of caution. How this is best to be done, every man must judge from his own experience. The attacks of temptation are so numerous and various, that no art can lay down the proper rules of securing ourselves against them. This, however, may be said, that the wisest way, in general, is, as much as possible, to avoid them. If danger arises from company,

fly

fly from it. If idleness be the nurse of vice, seek innocent and constant employment. If solitude beget vicious thoughts or desires, take refuge from them in virtuous society. But, above all things, hold no parley with temptation: for the man that once deliberates on the brink of vice, is too surely in danger of being lost in its bottomless abyss.

3dly, If we are in earnest in praying that God would not lead us into temptation, we should be very cautious not to lead others into temptation. It is, indeed, a kind of sport with many to lead young persons, or for them to lead each other, into scenes of debauchery and riot: but assuredly it is the sport of devils, and not of men: it is making proselytes to the kingdom of darkness, at the expence of our own salvation, and that of others also: and whoever thou art, that delightest in this diabolical employment, thou wilt one day find, that thou hast sins enough of thy own to answer for, without drawing down upon thy head those of others also.

4thly, When we consider that weakness, which leads us to pray against temptation, it should teach us humility in ourselves, and charity to others. For do we feel ourselves too feeble to stand without God's assistance, and shall

shall we pretend to boast of our strength? Or, again, are we every moment liable to fall ourselves, and shall we be severe to the slips of others, who are men of like passions and infirmities with ourselves? No: rather let our own weakness teach us caution and humility:—let our own past frailty and errors teach us to extend that compassion and indulgence to others, which we ourselves stand daily in need of from God; and, whilst we pray to God that we fall not into temptation, let us pity, not condemn, those who have been tempted above what they were able to bear.

As our Saviour begins this divine prayer with an address to God as our Father, who is willing to grant what we ask; so also he fitly concludes it with an acknowledgement of his universal power, to shew that he is able to do it: "For "thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the "glory, for ever and ever."

It must, indeed, be owned, that this conclusion is not in St. Luke, and probably was not originally in St. Matthew, and, therefore, we find it commonly omitted in our church liturgy: however it is certainly of very ancient use, and very properly expresses the universal sovereignty and power of him to whom we pray.—"For

" thine is the kingdom:"—And whither shall we go, where this kingdom of God is not visible? If we endeavour to fly from him, he filleth all space, and, therefore, is ever near us. —" Am I a God at hand," saith the Lord, " and not a God afar off?"—" Can any hide " himself in secret places, that I shall not see " him? Do not I fill heaven and earth?"

If we think, again, that time will blot out crimes from his memory, we deceive ourselves in vain: for he filleth all time, and inhabiteth eternity. To him past, present and future are visible at one all-comprehensive view; and, therefore, nothing can escape his notice.

His, too, is the power, and from him all power is derived. The strongest arm would wither, and the noblest genius dwindle into idiotism, in one moment, without his support and aid. We talk, indeed, of chance, nature, destiny and fortune; but these are idle words, without meaning and without propriety. God is the mainspring of all: in the sublime language of scripture, " his incorruptible spirit is in all things:" —he forms the light and creates darkness:—the stars obey him in their courses:—at his command, the sea and its proud waves are stayed. If man be the only rebel amidst the creation, he

has the more reason to take shame to himself, and to be humbled in the dust before the Lord his maker.

His, too, is the glory;—the glory of whatever is good and exellent in the world,—the glory of whatever we either do or enjoy. To him, therefore, man should think it his highest honour to submit: to him kings should bow their sceptres with reverence and gratitude: to him angels and seraphs should stoop, and cry out, Thine is the glory: for thou art worthy to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

With trembling feet, and at an awful distance, I have thus far presumed to follow the steps of Omnipotence, and to explain the divine language of Him, who spake as never man spake: it now only remains, therefore, for me briefly to recall to your memories the substance of what I have before said in a more full and comprehensive manner, and to give what I conceive to be the sense of this divine prayer, in a short paraphrase upon it.

Thou, God,—who art our Father, and therefore most willing,—who art in heaven, and there-

therefore most able, to relieve the wants of thy distressed children upon earth; I acknowledge thy divine power and authority, with all the reverence and humility becoming a wretched and sinful creature: yet, emboldened by that paternal kindness, by which thou hast permitted me to cry, Abba, Father, I dare to look up from earth to heaven;—to raise my voice in prayer, from this region of sin and misery to that throne of ineffable majesty, on which thou hast been seated from all eternity.

But, let me not presume to utter my own wants, till I have first expressed that veneration, which is due to thy adorable essence and attributes: may, therefore, thy name be hallowed! may it never be uttered but with pure and hallowed lips! may it be known and adored by all the nations of the world! may thy divine majesty be above all things glorified and honoured! and may whatever more immediately relates to thee or thy service, ever be treated with becoming decency and respect!

Yet, where, alas! is that decency and respect to be found? where, rather, is not thy name despised, and thy authority trampled upon, by open wickedness or secret hypocrisy, by careless indifference or avowed infidelity? To correct, there-

fore, this rebellious temper of thy presumptuous creatures, may thy kingdom come! Make all the world to acknowledge the kingdom of thy dear Son, by embracing his doctrine, and obeying his precepts; rule in our hearts by thy kingdom of grace, that we may live as becometh the Gospel of Christ; and hasten thy kingdom of glory; that, when this life is ended, we, with all those that are departed in the true faith and fear of Christ, may reign with thee in glory for ever. And in order to this, may thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven! May we patiently suffer whatever thou art pleased to lay upon us, in our passage through this vain and transitory world; ever looking up to our great Exemplar, who, in the midst of agony unsupportable, was enabled to cry out, Not my will, but thine be done! And may thy frail creatures on earth, in proportion to their strength and abilities, endeavour to execute thy commands with the same faithfulness and alacrity, as they are done by thy holy angels and ministers in heaven; who cease not, day and night, to encircle thy throne, and are ever on the wing to perform the sacred mandates of their great Master.

But, though we cannot be thus perfect in our obedience, yet we know, thou wilt not be extreme to mark what is done amiss;—thou wilt

pity

pity what thou canst not approve: and wilt not leave us destitute, though we have no right to thy favour. Relying, therefore, on that gracious disposition, whose nature and property is ever to have mercy, we farther request thee to give us this day our daily bread. Bestow upon us, little as we deserve them, the necessaries and conveniences of a mortal body, which, day by day, our various wants and infirmities oblige us to call for;—and still more especially, give us, day by day, that better bread of life, which is necessary for the support of our immortal souls here, and without which we must die eternally.

And whilst we thus bend the knee to thee for a supply of our own wants, O melt our hearts to a tender consideration of the wants of others. Teach us to pity and comfort those afflicted thousands, whose hard lot is misery and distress, and whose unsheltered nakedness is exposed to the cold winds of heaven, and the piercing calls of unsatisfied hunger.

And, since in this mortal state we cannot be free from sin, suffer us to request from thee the forgiveness of that sin:—Forgive us our trespasses,—our trespasses against thee a God,—even as we forgive the trespasses and infirmities of men, weak and fallible like ourselves.

I know, O gracious Father, that my transgressions against thee are many: I feel, therefore, the necessity of thy forgiveness, without which I can have no comfort here, and misery must be my portion hereafter. I know, too, that thou hast promised that forgiveness on the condition only of my forgiving others their trespasses: I do, therefore, with gratitude and joy, accept the gracious condition: I do now in thy presence, to whom all hearts are open, from the bottom of my heart forgive all those, who have injured me in thought, word, or deed; and I resolve to make this readiness to forgive, the leading principle of my conduct through life, even as I hope to find forgiveness at that awful hour, when naked and defenceless before thy throne, I can have no hope or refuge,—no anchor of my soul,—but in that mercy, which thou hast promised through Christ to the gentle and forgiving.

But ah! what have I said? Can I hope, then, to preserve this unsinning obedience? Dare I presume thus far on the frailty of human nature? Alas! whilst I do in all sincerity thus profess to make thy law the rule of my conduct, I know, O God, whereof we are made,—I remember that we are but dust. O strengthen me, therefore, by thy aid in these holy resolutions;

tions;—suffer me not to be tried above what I am able to bear;—suffer not my weakness to be ensnared by the temptations of the world, the flesh, or the devil;—give me not up in anger to the power of my own heart's lusts, by which, without thy aid, I am sure to be overcome; but either keep me from the hour of temptation, or by thy grace and presence support me under it.

And deliver us from evil:—from that evil one, who is daily seeking whom he may devour;—from the evil and mischief of sin;—and from the evil of misery; that is, thy wrath and everlasting damnation, which is ever the consequence of sin.

And this, we acknowledge, thou art able to do: For thine is the kingdom; the authority and right of dominion over all, whether men or things:—Thine is the power; the ability and strength to command all:—Thine is the glory; the glory and honour of all that is perfect, excellent, or amiable in the world; and that, not only at present, but through all ages,—from everlasting to everlasting, for ever and ever.

Let all the people, with united hearts and voices, say, Amen!

And may that God, who sitteth supreme in heaven, ever condescend to hear and grant our petitions, whenever we address him in the words of this divine prayer, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XIV.

2 KINGS v. 1, 2, 3.

Now Naaman, the captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable; because by him the Lord had given deliverance to Syria; he was also a mighty man in valour; but he was a leper.

And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid, and she waited on Naaman's wife.

And she said unto her mistress, Would God my Lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria; for he would recover him of his leprosy!

THE penman of the holy scripture is God: the design of them is the instruction of man. We may, therefore, be assured, that there is no part of them but may be turned to our spiritual

spiritual advantage, if we read them with an honest heart and teachable disposition. But perhaps there is no part more full of useful instruction for the conduct of life, than the several historic chapters, which our church hath wisely appointed to be read in the order of its public service: for, however they may be considered by the ignorant and unthinking, as mere matters of historic information, they will afford to the wise and considerate Christian, ample matter for profitable meditation; by setting before him the great wisdom and guidance of providence, the wonderful fates and revolutions of kings and kingdoms, the surprising depravity of the human heart, the pious examples of holy persons, and the just vengeance of God upon prosperous or presumptuous guilt.

Having these considerations in view, I have made choice of the historic words contained in the text; partly, as I hope to draw from them some observations which may be of general use; and partly, as they will furnish a specimen of that instruction in righteousness, which an attentive mind will draw from the several histories related to us in the Old Testament.

The sacred historian describes Naaman, the subject of our present consideration, in these words:

word:—"Naaman, captain of the host of the "king of Syria, was a great man with his "master, and honourable; because by him the "Lord had given deliverance to Syria; he was "also a mighty man in valour; but he was a "leper." It appears, then, that he was a great warrior; that he was commander-in-chief of the troops of Benhadad, king of Syria; that he was a favourite of his master, and in great esteem at court, which he had acquired by his bravery and military exploits, being, as the Jews conjecture, the man, who "drew the bow at a venture, and "smote the king of Israel between the joints of "the harness." However, he was certainly the person, as the sacred penman tells us, "by "whom the Lord had given deliverance to "Syria." Here, then, we see, that this great captain was no more than an instrument in the hand of God, to execute his designs. His valour, his wisdom, his political and military virtues, were all the gifts of heaven, which were bestowed and employed by the King of kings, to chastise and humble the rebellious Israelites! Let this, then, serve as a reproof to those, who ascribe all events to second causes, and deny that the finger of God is visible in sieges and battles; who look not beyond the surface of things, but rashly conclude, that the prudence of the commander, or the courage of the soldiers,

diers, gives victory and success. Let them learn from holy David, that "no king can be saved "by the multitude of an host, nor any mighty "man be delivered by much strength," except God be on his side.—If Naaman is valiant, it is the Lord that gives him valour: if he delivers the Syrians, it is the Lord that delivers them by his hand.

But the text tells us farther, this great man was a leper. It does not concern us to inquire, what sort of leprosy this was; but it was doubtless of that deadly species, which prevailed in Syria, and was deemed incurable.

See here, then, the true estimate of all human felicity!—The favourite of a great king, the first in power and reputation in the armies of Syria, cannot secure himself from the ravages of a vile and noxious disorder. Let us, therefore, eat our bread in content and quietness, without envying the splendor or opulence of the great, though our condition be low; knowing that thorns are often entwined in the crown of royalty, and that every station in life has its leprosy.

But, though there was no remedy for Naaman in Syria, there was in Judæa, in mount Carmel, where the prophet Elisha dwelt. And there he goes

goes to seek a remedy for his disease, guided by a particular providence, which had determined to shew an extraordinary mark of his mercy and power in him.

But let us observe, as we go along, the very plain and ordinary methods made use of by God to bring about this great design.—A party of soldiers sally out from the Syrian camp, make an incursion into the land of Israel, and carry away a little maid prisoner into their own country. She, according to the custom of those times, is sold, and becomes a slave in Naaman's house. The misfortune of her master being there known to her, she thinks of an expedient that might probably be attended with advantage to him; and she said to her mistress, "Would God my "lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria; "for he would recover him of his leprosy." The discourse of this little captive maid comes to Naaman's ears, who tells it to the king, and, in conclusion, her advice is followed. Naaman sets out for Judæa, and is miraculously cured of his leprosy; and, what is still more extraordinary and important, is cured of his mental leprosy, that is, of his idolatry, and converted to the worship of the true God.

Now

Now if we consider this chain of circumstances, which all contributed to the cure and conversion of the Syrian general, there is nothing in it but what is common and natural, and what daily happens. But if we view it with an eye of faith, we shall clearly perceive in it the guiding hand of providence, which overrules all things, even the smallest, and can, by the most inconsiderable means, bring about the greatest events; or, in the elegant language of the psalmist, "out "of the mouth of babes and sucklings, ordaineth "strength."

Let us, therefore, never pass judgment on the train of things that are before us. God may have designs to answer by them, which we foresee not. We cannot fathom the depths of his wisdom: for who hath known the "mind of the "Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?" In his hand the most seeming improbabilities and distant circumstances conspire to form the same great event. Naaman, we see, must be a leper, to undertake a journey to Judæa; where Elisha at the same time expects him, by the command of God. A company of Syrians must take captive a daughter of Israel, that Naaman may know that there is a prophet in Israel, capable of healing his leprosy. This little maid, though

though she might have been the spoil of any other, must be a slave in his house, and concerned for the misfortune of her master, that this leper might be made whole. Without all these concurring circumstances, Naaman had never been healed of his leprosy, nor come to the knowledge of the true God; nor had the king and court of Syria known, that there was a God in Israel, greater than the gods of the nations, and who doeth wonderous things alone. Who art thou, then, that sayest to the Almighty, why doest thou so? Canst thou, in the falling acorn, the food of swine, discern the future tree, the vehicle of commerce, the bulwark of nations? Canst thou behold in Naaman's leprosy his succeeding conversion from idolatry? Look, then to his fate, and learn submission to that wise providence, which from the smallest beginnings, can call forth the greatest ends; from a dark chaos can command the light to shine; from a mass of shapeless matter can form a world.

But it may be asked, perhaps, What occasion was there for so many circumstances, when God might have done the same thing by a nearer and shorter way? Or, what necessity was there for the concurrence of so many second causes, when the first alone would have been sufficient?

To

To this question I might justly answer in the animated language of St. Paul, "Shall the "thing formed say to him that formed it, why "hast thou made me thus?" We weak mortals know but a small part of the ways of the Almighty, and, therefore, it is not for us to scrutinize his proceedings, or to judge of his laws.

But to give a more direct answer to this objection, we may sufficiently vindicate the ways of God to man in this case, by shewing, that many wise purposes were answered by this method of procedure: for it contributed at once to convert Naaman, and to make his conversion the more conspicuous and memorable: it was a standing proof of the power of the God of Israel over all the false gods of the nations, and, at the same time, a durable monument to after ages, that the seeds of the knowledge of the true God had once been sown among the idolatrous Syrians: and very probably it might also answer other purposes, either with regard to the kingdom of Israel, or Naaman's own family, or to Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, and to those who were the witnesses of this great miracle. So that there might be abundant reason for all the circumstances which accompanied Naaman's journey into the land of Israel.

No

No sooner had Naaman obtained the consent of his royal master, than he departed, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment; probably as a present for the prophet: and, to make sure of his success, he carries with him a letter from the king of Syria to the king of Israel, couched in these words: "Now when "this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have "therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, "that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." The stile of this letter could not be very agreeable to the king of Israel: for the scripture tells us, "when he had read it, he rent his clothes, "and said, Am I a God, to kill and to make "alive, that this man doth send unto me to re-"cover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore con-"sider now, I pray you, and see, how he "seeketh a quarrel against me." Had his anger been levelled only against the arrogant stile of the letter, which required from him a thing which was in the hands of God alone,—there being none but he who killeth and maketh alive, that could stop the ravages of an incurable disease, Joram would have had just cause for his indignation. But it is more probable that he rent his clothes out of vexation at seeing himself, as he thought, threatened with the arms of the Syrians. For he saw the valiant Naaman at his

court, whose courage had before routed the Israelitish army, and he concludes, by the stile of the letter he brought with him, that he was reduced to this hard alternative, either that he must cure him of his leprosy, which he knew himself unable to do, or be exposed to the fury of Benhadad: he says, therefore, "Consider, I "pray you, and see, how he seeketh a quarrel "against me."

Had he indeed had any communication or intercourse with Elisha, he might soon have been eased of the anxiety, into which this letter had thrown him, and have known, that it was not from himself, but from the prophet of God, that the cure of Naaman was expected. But religion was no part of Jehoram's concern, and, therefore, he paid little regard to the prophets of the Lord. He had forgot, or did not care to remember, the miracles he had seen wrought by Elisha; or, perhaps, was loth to see any farther demonstration of his power with God, and, therefore, never thought of sending to him upon this distressing emergency.

And so will it ever happen to those, who, in their prosperity, despise God and his messengers. When they most stand in need of comfort and assistance, they will be most unable to find it:

" They shall cry, but there shall be none to hear
" them."

However, Naaman's arrival at court, the cause of his coming, and Joram's inquietude, soon reached the ears of the man of God in Samaria. Knowing, therefore, the power which was given him from on high, " he sent to the king, say-
" ing, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes?
" Let him come now to me, and he shall know
" that there is a prophet in Israel."

Probably those words carried with them a secret reproach to the king and his false prophets. As if he had said, " 'Tis conscious guilt alone
" that makes you tremble at the presence of
" this stranger. Ye know that ye have aban-
" doned the God of Israel, and therefore have
" no right to claim his protection. But let this
" Syrian come now to me, and I will shew him,
" that God has not forsaken his people;—that
" the God whom I worship and ye have for-
" saken, is still mighty to save,—and that there
" is yet a prophet in Israel, who can speak com-
" fort, when all the false prophets of Baal are
" dumb and confounded."

Naaman, being informed of the prophet's discourse, and, no doubt, impatient to know the

issue of a matter so interesting to himself, lost no time, but "came," we are told, "with his "horses and his chariot, and stood at the door "of the house of Elisha;" perhaps expecting that the prophet would come out to meet him, or rather unwilling to go in, till he had first acquainted him with the reasons of his coming.

The favourite of a great king humbly waiting at the door of a prophet, will probably seem a little strange in these days; and perhaps it will seem still stranger, that the prophet did not go out to meet him, but only sends a messenger to inform him what he must do to effect the cure of his leprosy. There are, however, several sufficient reasons to be assigned for this part of the prophet's behaviour. He might not care to approach near a leprous man, with whom the Jews were expressly forbidden to have any communication;—he might be willing to humble the pride of Naaman, and to shew him, that the greatest men ought to lay down their pride, and become like little children before the God of Israel, if they expected to enjoy his assistance and help;—he might intend to try his faith; or, perhaps, to convince him, that his recovery was a thing so easy to the God of nature, that there was no occasion for more, than to speak a word at a distance, to effect it. However this might be,

be, the prophet did not think fit to speak to him himself, but only directs him by a messenger, to wash seven times in the river Jordan, with a promise that, if he did so, he should be cured of his leprosy. Not that these waters had any peculiar virtue in them; but it was the prophet's intention, by the simplicity of the means prescribed, to shew more strongly the miraculousness of the cure. Nor again, was there any peculiar charm in the number seven times; it might be only mentioned as a trial of his faith and submission, that he should wash in Jordan so many times, or out of a customary use of that number, which was held in great veneration among the Jews, from the septenary day of rest from their labours, in commemoration of the creation, and of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Little, however, was this order relished by Naaman. For the sacred historian tells us, "He was wroth, and went away, and said, "I thought, surely he will come out to me, and "call upon the name of his God, and strike his "hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are "not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, "better than all the waters of Israel? May I "not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned "and went away in a rage."

Thus it is ever with the foolish vanity of men! They slight common and easy things, and admire only what is difficult and rare: they reject the means which heaven prescribes for their welfare, if they happen not to suit with their own fond conceits and ridiculous prepossessions.

But in this answer Naaman more particularly shewed his pride and his superstition. Accustomed to the homage and respect of a king's favourite, he could ill brook the treatment he met with from the prophet, so very unlike the servile adulation of an eastern court. "I "thought," says he, "he will surely come "out, and stand and call on the name of his "God." He, therefore, was disposed to reject the prophet's advice, because it was not sweetened with that complaisance and respect to his greatness to which he had long been accustomed.

But this was not all. Habituated to the false pomp and pageantry of superstition, he expected some solemn rites or ceremonies to have accompanied the promised cure. "I thought," says he, "he will surely come out to me, and call "upon the name of his God, and strike his "hand over the place, and recover the leper."

As

As if the invocation or touch of the prophet had more power than the command of God! But thus it ever is. Superstition deals in outward pomp and ceremony: it requires altars, reliques, processions, and gods to go before the people. The waters of Jordan were too plain and simple, without some parade of external rites, to satisfy the superstitious Syrian: instead, therefore, of going towards Jordan, in obedience to the man of God, he contemptuously prefers the rivers of Damascus to all the waters of Israel, and then turned, and went away in a rage.

I shall conclude my remarks upon this part of Naaman's history, with this one important observation; that it is our wisest way, in all cases, to submit to the methods and disposals of Providence, without presuming, like Naaman, to call in question the fitness and wisdom of them. God is in heaven, we on earth. Whilst, therefore, the limited view of mortality takes in but a small part of created things, the unbounded eye of Omniscience surveys the whole. God is, therefore, the best and only true judge of what is fitting and convenient for us. We are not, however, to sit still, expecting miracles, like that of Naaman, to be wrought in our favour. For though we are not to resist, yet we are surely to co-operate, as far as in our power, with the

of Providence for our conversion and cure. Our modern pretenders indeed to inspiration, tell us of sudden illapses and momentaneous illuminations, by which the conversion of sinners is wrought. But such operations are neither agreeable to the usual course of Providence, nor the tenor of scripture: it is much, therefore, to be feared, that they are the delusions of those spirits, which are not of God. It will, therefore, be our safer way to rely on the merits of Christ, rather than on those deceitful assurances of salvation, which are held out to their ignorant followers, by false teachers;—to co-operate with the grace of God in working out our own salvation by sincere repentance and active holiness, rather than to trust to a pretended justification, which is wrought in us we know not why, and which acts in a way we cannot explain, and, therefore, is much to be suspected to be the production of a distempered brain, or heated imagination, of an artful delusion or mercenary invention, rather than the good work of God to promote our salvation.

SERMON XV.

2 KINGS v. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.

And his servants came near, and spake unto him and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith unto thee, wash and be clean?—Then he went down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.—And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him: and he said: Behold, now I know, that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. But he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused.—And Naaman said, Shall there not, then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant

two

two mules burden of earth?—For thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice, unto any other God, but unto the Lord.

THE conversion of a sinner is represented in scripture under various similitudes, expressive of the greatness of the change that is wrought in him. Sometimes it is called a change into the image of God: "We are changed into "the same image from glory to glory." Sometimes it is called a resurrection from the sleep of death: "Awake, thou that sleepest, arise from "the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." And in other places it is described as "a new "creation," as a "putting off the old man, "which is corrupt, and putting on the new "man, which after God is created in righteous- "ness and true holiness."

And this is the change we are going to consider in Naaman, concerning whom the words of the text are spoken, after he had washed in the waters of Jordan. From a fierce and intractable idolator, he became a meek and zealous worshipper of the one true God. The sacred historian describes him, as enraged at the seeming incivility of the man of God, and returning to his own country, without so much as condescending

scending to try the easy remedy prescribed for his recovery. But when his servants saw him thus blind to reason, and acting contrary to his own interest, they had the wise resolution to argue the case coolly with him;—"they came "near, and spake unto him and said, My fa- "ther, if the prophet had bid thee do some "great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? "How much rather then, when he saith unto "thee, wash and be clean?" They soften the boldness of their address to him, we see, by giving him the honourable title of my Father, which was a term of respect usually given in the East to all superiors, such as kings, magistrates, and prophets, to denote a reverence for, and dependance upon them; but, at the same time, they were very far from flattering him in his obstinacy or resentment: they represent to him, that the advice was that of a prophet acting under the influence of God; that he might have prescribed to him some hard or painful remedy, and that, even then, it would have been his duty to submit to it: how much more, therefore, was it so, when he only required him to wash and be clean?

Naaman was not so stupified with rage, but that he could hear the voice of reason: he therefore yielded to the advice of his servants, and

and determined at least to try the prescribed remedy; which he had undertaken so long a journey to obtain: "He went down, and dipped "himself seven times in Jordan, according to "the saying of the man of God." And well was he repaid for his obedience and recollection: "For his flesh came again like the flesh of a "little child, and he was clean."

There can be no doubt, I think, but that this sudden and perfect cure was the effect of a divine influence then communicated to the river. For, if the waters of Jordan had possessed any natural virtue of curing the leprosy, the many lepers we read of in Israel, would not have failed to use a remedy so salutary, and so near at hand. But we find no other instance than this before us, of the cure of this horrible disorder, till that Son of God came into the world, by whom "the "lepers were cleansed, and the dead raised." And indeed our Saviour plainly intimates, that this was a miraculous cure, when, to convince the people of Nazareth that they were unworthy of the benefit of miracles, because of their infidelity, he tells them, "that there were many "lepers in Israel in the time of Eliseus the pro-"phet, and none of them was cleansed, save "Naaman the Syrian."

This

This cure, then, was the work of heaven, the effect of a supernatural virtue. And it appears that Naaman considered it as such: for he was so affected with it that he was immediately converted to the worship of the God of Israel, whose goodness and power he had so wonderfully experienced.

Being thus cured, then, of his leprosy, and finding a ray of heavenly light dart into his soul, his first care was to acquit himself to his benefactors, the God of Israel, and his servant the man of God, and to pay those acknowledgements of gratitude, which were so justly due to them. A conduct how different this from theirs, who earnestly beg mercies and deliverances from heaven, but when they have received them, often too soon forget the hand from whence they come; who, like the nine lepers in the Gospel, think not of returning back to give glory to God, but go their way, and forget what manner of men they were.

Not so the wiser Syrian leper. He knew, that the only way to draw down new blessings upon his head, was to make a proper use of those he had already received. However desirous, therefore, he might be to pay his duty to his royal master, or to receive the congratulations of his friends,

friends, he thought, that there was a superior duty due to the God of heaven, who had restored him. "He, therefore, returned to the "man of God, he and all his company, and "came and stood before him."

Here his first care was to acknowledge the sovereignty of the God of Israel over all the false and pretended gods of the Gentile world: "Now "know I," says he, "I experimentally know, "by this great miracle which has been wrought "upon me, that there is no God in all the "earth, but in Israel." Thus, whilst with his heart he believed unto righteousness, with his mouth also he made a noble confession unto salvation; and that not in private, before the prophet only, but before all his servants and company; declaring, that "he would henceforth "offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice to any "other God but unto the Lord."

His next care was to reward the prophet, the man of God: "Now, therefore," says he, "I "pray thee take a blessing of thy servant." And here we may remark the change which is wrought in him by the miraculous cure he had received. He, who before went away in a rage, because he thought the prophet was wanting in a proper respect to him, now calls himself his servant:

vant: "I pray thee," says he, "take a blessing "of thy servant." In fact, he now thought him the minister of the true God, the instrument which heaven made use of in effecting his cure, and that, therefore, no respect could be too great for him.

For the same reason, he offers him a present, as a mark of his gratitude; and that, if we may judge from the reward he formerly brought with him, no inconsiderable one. But Elisha, who was much more solicitous for the honour of his God, than intent upon his own advantage, strenuously refused it: "As the Lord liveth, be-"fore whom I stand, I will receive none. And "he urged him to take it, but he still refused "it:" probably to convince him, that the servants of the God of Israel were not like the mercenary priests of the heathen gods, but, like the great master they served, had a pleasure in doing good to mankind, hoping for nothing again.

Naaman, not being able to prevail upon the prophet to accept his present, proposes a pretty remarkable question to him, which has been the subject of much conjecture amongst the learned: "Shall there not then, I pray thee, "be

" be given to thy servant two mules burden of " earth?"

Some have thought that this question took its rise from the remains of superstition in Naaman, and that he concluded that there was more intrinsic holiness in the earth of Israel than in that of Syria.

The Jewish commentators fancy, that he desired to have this present out of Elisha's house, or even from under his feet; thinking, perhaps, that there was a peculiar sacredness in every thing the prophet had touched, or that he would infuse a peculiar virtue into it by his blessing, as he had done into the waters of Jordan.

Others pretend to find here an instance of veneration and devotion to holy things, and that he desired this earth, as a sacred relique of the prophet to make an object of worship in his own house.

There are others, again, who think he desired it to build a monument in his own country, agreeably to the custom of those times, as a public testimony of gratitude, and a memorial

rial of the mercy he had received in the land of Israel.

But, not to have recourse to mystery, or to waste your time in confuting opinions, which have no foundation in the sacred text, it will be sufficient to say, that the reason of this question is very clearly explained in the words immediately following it: "Shall there not, I "pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules "burden of earth?" And why? "For thy ser- "vant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offer- "ing nor sacrifice to any other god, but unto "the Lord." It is plain, therefore, that his intention was to build an altar with it to the God of Israel. He probably was not ignorant, that by the Jewish law he was not permitted to offer sacrifices to God out of the Holy Land, which God had particularly chosen for the place of his worship. Since, therefore, his duty to his prince would not suffer him to reside in the Holy Land, he at least wished to have an altar in Syria, formed of that holy ground to which God had assigned the blessing of his peculiar presence, that he might daily testify his gratitude for the mercy he had received, that he might openly declare his renunciation of idolatry, and that he might keep up a communica-

tion, by a similitude of worship, with the chosen people, the Israel of God.

The present time will not allow me to enter upon the conclusion of this history; as it contains a point of nice and difficult discussion. I shall, therefore, content myself with making two or three observations upon that part of it, which we have already considered.

And 1st, Naaman's cure and conversion, we see, was a miracle of God's peculiar mercy to him. But let us reflect what were the methods, which God made use of to bring him to a fit disposition for receiving this great mercy: were they not pain and disease, the miseries of a worn-out and afflicted body? The Almighty, doubtless, could have found out other ways of converting this honest Syrian, and of bringing him into his covenant. But he chose disease and affliction, as the surest way to bring him to a sight of himself: it was a nauseous and inveterate leprosy that carried him into Judæa, to receive the salvation of his soul, as well as the healing of his body.

See here, then, an instructive lesson, by which we may be taught the usefulness and efficacy of afflictions,

afflictions, and the advantages we may reap from them, with regard to our spiritual welfare! How often have diseases and calamities weaned mens affections from the world; when they had, as it were, sold themselves to commit iniquity, and were running headlong to destruction? How often have sickness and afflictions awakened sinners who were slumbering securely in the bosom of voluptuousness, though on the very brink of ruin and eternal misery? How often, again, have those judgments, which God has inflicted upon mankind, either in public or private calamities, struck terror and remorse, when the still voice of reason has been neglected and despised? So that, however painful afflictions may be to us, we may justly say with holy David, "It is good for me that I have "been in trouble. Before I was troubled I "went wrong; but now will I keep thy com-"mandments."

2dly, We may observe from Naaman's case, upon what easy terms God is pleased to bestow his mercies. The man of God requires no more of him, than to wash seven times in Jordan, to be healed of his inveterate leprosy. And what could he have required less, for so great and wonderful a cure? And what is it that the Lord your God requires of you all, for the

healing that spiritual leprosy of sin, with which the whole race of mankind is infected? Only to repent and to believe. And what could he have required less? How inexcusable, therefore, must they be, who neglect so easy a remedy for sin, that worst disease and leprosy of mankind? May we not justly say to them, as the servants of Naaman said to their master, "My father, "if the prophet had bid thee do some great "thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How "much rather, when he saith to thee, wash, "and be clean?"

Lastly, Consider the unexpected bounty of God towards this poor afflicted Syrian. He went only into Judæa to be healed of his bodily infirmity, but God grants him, at the same time, a spiritual cure of much greater importance: he admits him into his covenant, adopts him into the number of his elect children, and gives unto him eternal life.

And in the same manner our blessed Redeemer acted towards those, who came to be healed by him. The woman of Canaan asked only for the crumbs which fell from the table; but he gave her the bread of life. The poor paralytic man wished only to be restored to his limbs; but Jesus restored him also to the favour of his

God. The thief on the cross requested only to be remembered in his kingdom; but his dying Saviour answered, "To-day shalt thou be with "me in paradise."

And ask your consciences, how often this has been your own case? Have I not received blessings, which I never solicited? Have I not found favour, where I deserved punishment? Do I not enjoy more mercies, than I have ever acknowledged as they deserve? May I not justly take up the humble confession of the good patriarch, "O God of my fathers, I am "not worthy of the least of all the mercies, "and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed "unto thy servant: for with my staff, single "and unsupported, without friends and without "wealth, I passed over this Jordan: and now, "by thy favour, I am become two bands of "men."

How happy, therefore, are we to serve so good, so merciful, and so gracious a Master, who is ever ready to do exceeding abundantly for us, above all that we can ask or think! And how does it become us, on all occasions, to acknowledge his mercies, to obey his commands, and to love him with all our heart, and with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all

our might, and to endeavour that, both by ourselves and others, his name may be for ever glorified, and his blessed will be done in earth as it is in heaven!

SERMON

SERMON XVI.

2 KINGS v. 18, 19.

In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon; when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.

And he said unto him, Go in peace.

HAVING already considered the lessons of moral instruction deducible from the history of Naaman, I am now led to the consideration of a passage, which has given no small employment to the thoughts and pens of the learned world. And indeed it is a passage, which manifestly carries with it some difficulty and semblance of obscurity, at the first appearance. For it cannot but seem strange to every

reader, that the Syrian convert, after he had made the strongest professions of his acknowledgement of the God of Israel, and solemnly declared, that he would henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto any other gods, but unto the Lord only; should yet immediately request Elisha's permission to go with his master into the temple of Rimmon, and bow down before a Syrian idol. And it may seem still stranger that the prophet should appear to consent to his proposal, and bid him go in peace.

But, whilst the learned have been thus busied in vindicating the sincerity of Naaman, the corrupt and deceitful have been no less forward in wresting his example to countenance their own hypocrisy and dissimulation in matters of religion. Like him, they know no other God, but the God of heaven and earth: like him, they are ready, in private, to pay him the spiritual worship that is his due: like him, they are willing to build an altar to his name, and raise their hearts, in secret, to the God that made the world: but, at the same time, they are no less ready to fall down before an idol, or to join for convenience in any way of worship; pretending by this example of Naaman, to silence the reproaches of conscience, and to be able to answer for their conduct before God.

Amidst

Amidst this variety of contention and learned labour, it shall be my present business, first, to set the words of the text in as clear a light as I can, from considering one or two of the principal interpretations, which have been given of them; and, secondly, to shew, that this sort of hypocrisy has no foundation in the example of Naaman.

And 1st, It has been suggested by two learned writers *, before whose respectable authority I bow down with becoming reverence and humility, that Naaman here asks pardon of God, not for any thing that he was going to do, but for an action that was already past; for a sin committed in the time of his ignorance, before he was enlightened with the knowledge of the true God. And, therefore, agreeably to this interpretation, the words ought to be thus translated: "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, "that when my master formerly went into the "house of Rimmon to worship there, and he "leaned on my hand, and I bowed myself in "the house of Rimmon,—the Lord pardon thy "servant in this thing." And in support of this interpretation it has been urged, first, that it is much more probable that Naaman should

* Lightfoot and Bochart.

suppli-

supplicate God's forgiveness for a crime already committed, than for one which he was going to commit; secondly, that this interpretation is much more consistent with his former renunciation of idolatry; and, lastly, that it is very agreeable to the idiom of the Hebrew language.

But, in answer to these several arguments, I would briefly observe,

First, That the many circumstances here mentioned by Naaman, plainly shew, that something more was meant than a bare general renunciation of idolatry. Secondly, That a deprecation of his past sin in bowing down to Rimmon was no way, at this time, necessary; since he had already declared his intention of worshipping God only, for the future, who, by the miracle wrought in his favour, had clearly expressed his acceptance of him. Thirdly, That there is no appearance of his supplicating forgiveness for a past sin, according to any reasonable interpretation. And, lastly, That, though this interpretation may be fairly reconciled to the idiom of the Hebrew language, yet it will not from thence follow, that it is true.

A second interpretation, with greater probability, supposes, that Naaman does not request leave

leave to go into the temple of Rimmon with his master to worship the idol, or even to pretend to do it, but only proposes a scruple to him about his attending him thither, by virtue of that temporal employment which he held under him.

To understand the nature of this interpretation aright, we must consider Naaman on the one hand, as a faithful subject to his royal master, and on the other as a sincere proselyte to the worship of the true God. As a faithful subject, he was ready to pay all obedience to his king; but as a sincere proselyte, he was unwilling to do any thing that might offend his God. Being doubtful, therefore, how far his duty to the one was compatible with his reverence to the other, in the instance mentioned in the text, he proposes his scruple to Elisha, and states it with all its circumstances.—"In this "thing," says he, "the Lord pardon thy ser-"vant, that when my master goeth into the "house of Rimmon to worship there, and he "leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the "house of Rimmon; when I bow down myself "in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon "thy servant in this thing." As if he had said, —I am fully determined to cleave to the worship of the God of Israel, and to renounce the worship of idols. But I foresee that the duty I owe

to

to my prince will lead me into a situation, which will have the appearance of practising or countenancing idolatry;—will lead me to enter into the idol temple with him, to bow down when he bows down, and, after the eastern custom, to support him whilst he is making his adoration to the idol-deity:—May I, therefore, without offending God or wounding my conscience, continue in the exercise of this duty? May I enter into the temple of Rimmon, when my master enters there? May I bow down when he bows down? God is my witness, that I will never worship the idol, or even pretend to do it: He, therefore, who knows my heart and the purity of my intentions, will in this thing, I hope, pardon his servant, and not impute it to him as a crime.

To this the prophet answers, "Go in peace:" which being a common form of valediction amongst the Jews, does not indeed contain any direct approbation of Naaman's request, but certainly does not carry with it any mark of disapprobation: and, therefore, we may fairly conclude, that the prophet did not think, that such an attendance upon his master would be sinful.

Against this interpretation it has been, indeed, objected, that an Israelite was forbidden to bow before

before an idol, whatsoever his mind or intention was in that act, and, therefore, it is not likely that the prophet should give his consent to Naaman's doing it.

To this I answer, that that prohibition was obligatory upon Israelites, but not upon strangers. They, who were descended from the stock of Abraham, were tied down to the observation of the whole law; as were also the adopted Jews, or Proselytes of the Covenant: but the Gentile strangers, or Proselytes of the Gate, were confined only to the worship of the true God, and the practice of the moral duties contained in the seven precepts supposed to be delivered to Noah. Naaman, therefore, being only a Proselyte of the Gate, might innocently keep his office at court as Joseph did in Egypt, and Daniel in Babylon; and also perform the civil duties of his office in the temple of Rimmon, so long as the service was paid to the man and not to the idol; so long as he was clean from that professed reverence, which constitutes the essence of spiritual adoration.

It has, again, been said, in opposition to this interpretation, that if this sort of indulgence were allowable to Naaman, there would have been no occasion for Daniel in the court of Nebuchad-

Nebuchadnezzar, or for old Eleazar among the officers of Antiochus, to have exposed themselves to those dreadful torments, to which they were condemned: the one might have fallen down before the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and the other have eaten swines' flesh, so long as they did it, not out of a principle of idolatry, but only in obedience to the king's command.

To this I answer, that the cases are by no means similar. These several acts were expressly required of Daniel and Eleazar as a formal renunciation of the true God, and an acknowledgment of idolatry: every compliance with them, therefore, would have been in the highest degree sinful. But Naaman's was barely the discharge of a civil duty, without any such idolatrous conditions. On the contrary, he clearly professes his design of not keeping his religion a secret from his master, by declaring his conversion publicly, before all his servants, and by carrying into Syria two mules burden of earth, to build an altar to the God of Israel. And it seems as clear, from these circumstances, that he did not imagine that his master would deny him the free use of his own religion, or expect from him any idolatrous conditions:—his request, therefore, is not that God would pardon him

him for dissembling his faith, and paying an outward reverence to the Syrian idol, to avoid persecution; but only that he might be allowed to accompany his master to the house of Rimmon, and to perform those offices of respect to him, which belonged to the favorite, on whose hand the king, according to the eastern custom, condescended to lean.

I proceed, secondly, to shew, that Naaman's conduct affords no countenance or justification to those, who deny or dissemble their religion, to avoid persecution, or to promote their temporal interests.

And here the point in question is not, whether we are always obliged to declare what religion or persuasion we are of, when nobody asks us; or, whether we may not lawfully conceal it, when we are asked by those, who have no right to do it: for, I suppose, the strictest casuist will allow, that there are many cases, in which we may innocently be silent. Nor, again, are we required to invite persecution or rush into danger: on the contrary, we may lawfully use every innocent expedient to avoid it.

The point in question is, whether, in a country, differing from us in religious principles, we may

may be justified in dissembling our own religion; —whether we can with a good conscience join in such religious worship as we know to be contrary to the word of God; that is, in short, whether a man may be a Papist at Rome, a Protestant in England, and a Mahometan or Idolater at Constantinople or Japan, provided he retains the purity of the Christian Faith in his heart.

And here it cannot be denied, that they who would justify this kind of dissimulation by the practice of Naaman, must suppose that the holy scripture is strangely contradictory to itself, and allows in one place what it expressly forbids in another: for, if there be any sin clearly and expressly forbidden in scripture, it is that of hypocrisy and dissimulation in religious worship: and if there be any duty clearly and expressly commanded in scripture, it is that of bearing witness to the truth by an honest and open profession of our faith, whenever we are called upon to make it by lawful authority. We are not allowed to halt between Baal and the Lord. We are not to serve God and mammon. God will have the whole, or none, of our service. How can we, therefore, imagine that Elisha, who acted by the Spirit of God, should countenance and allow in Naaman what the same Holy Spirit, in every other

other place, forbids? Were this the case; had either Naaman requested, or the prophet granted, leave, to pay an outward worship to the idols of Syria, whilst he inwardly acknowledged the God of Israel; the one would have been a false prophet, who prophesied deceits; and the other an ungrateful proselyte, who knew God, only to dishonour him by a base and servile compliance with the corruptions of his idolatrous master.

But, in reality, there is not the least shadow of such dissimulation in Naaman's conduct; not the least appearance of temporising, with a view to preserve the profits of his employment, or the favour of his prince.

For, 1st, we clearly see, he makes a general renunciation of all those false gods, whom he before worshipped, and declares that he will henceforth know no God, but the Lord only.

2dly, He publicly declares his resolutions, without any disguise or reserve, in the presence of the prophet and his own servants.

3dly, He desires to carry away with him some of the earth of Israel into his own country, to build an altar unto the Lord, and that he might

thereby keep up a correspondence with the church of God.

4thly, He fully professes, that he will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice to any other god, but unto the Lord.

Surely, therefore, there cannot be the least room for accusing him of hypocrisy in his religious conduct.

But it will be asked, perhaps, if his intentions were so sincere and free from dissimulation, why did he leave Judæa to return into his own idolatrous country; and why did not the prophet advise him to relinquish all his employments, rather than expose himself to the danger of relapsing into idolatry, and paying a base submission to the will of his prince?

To this I answer, it never was the design of any part of God's religion to free men from the obligation of their natural duties. The service every man owes to his king and to his country, is a clear and fundamental part of the law of nature, from which nothing can discharge him, so long as that service binds him to nothing sinful. Though Naaman, therefore, was converted from idolatry,

idolatry, yet he was by no means absolved from his allegiance. Had, indeed, his allegiance to his royal master and his duty to God been incompatible, he would have acted wisely, perhaps, in not returning into his own country. But the case seems to have been much otherwise. Benhadad appears to have entertained a sincere and well-founded regard for him, in consideration of his past services, and, therefore, Naaman never expresses the least doubt of being allowed to worship the God of Israel. Why, then, should he desert his native country, to which his services were justly due, and in which he had a grateful sovereign, and, probably, a numerous train of friends, prepared to welcome his return, and congratulate his recovery?

Perhaps, too, Providence might have some great, though unknown, design to bring about by his return to an idolatrous court; which would certainly tend to impress upon the Syrian nation an awful idea of the superior power of the God of Israel, and, at the same time, demonstrate that great truth, that in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

And, lastly, the Syrian captain might probably be as little likely to relapse into idolatry in his

own country, where he would meet with nothing to efface the reverential impression he had received of the true God, as if he had remained in Judæa, where the worshippers of that God, though they were blessed with the clearest knowledge of his will, were yet polluted too frequently with all the abominations of the Gentiles.

From what has been said, we may, in the first place, observe the weakness of those, who, under the pretence of Religion, break through the established rules of decency and order;—who, by an affected singularity of dress, or rusticity of manners, separate themselves from the world; as if we must cease to be men before we can be Christians.—A conduct very widely different from that of Naaman, who thought the discharge of his civil duties, and even an accommodation to the weakness of a superstitious prince, no way inconsistent with his duty to God, so long as he preserved his own integrity. And the case is still the same under the Christian, as it was under the Jewish dispensation. We have no restraints laid upon our Christian liberty, so that we do not abuse it. There are in every nation wise and established customs, convenient and settled rules of decorum, the fences of good order, and the necessary laws of intercourse between man and man: to these our Saviour himself

self constantly conformed, and to these we may also innocently conform, where they are not contrary to the laws of truth and virtue. And I believe it may generally be said, that that affectation of superior purity, which shews itself in preciseness of manners, in singularity of dress, and severity of censure, in opposition to the received modes and customs of the world, proceeds rather from a weakness of head or hypocrisy of heart, from the arrogance of pride or the sourness of spleen, than from a truly christian spirit, warmed by zeal and guided by charity.

But 2dly, Though we may safely conform to the innocent customs and forms of the world, yet we must at the same time beware, that we do not suffer our integrity to fall a sacrifice to our complaisance. We are not, indeed, like Naaman, tempted to fall down before idols of wood and stone; yet there are other idols no less dangerous to virtue. The house of Rimmon is not confined to Syria alone: it is to be found in every kingdom and nation. His images meet us in every place, under the specious disguises of pleasure, profit, pride, and ambition.

If, therefore, we make these the objects of our private adoration, or suffer them to divide our affections with the God of heaven,—we not

only bow down in the house of Rimmon, but, what is worse, we bow down to the image of Rimmon:—we are idolaters and not Christians.

If, again, we dissemble our religion before men;—if we abstain from its ordinances to avoid ridicule on ourselves, or tamely submit to hear it ridiculed by others; we are base and servile worshippers of that painted idol, popular opinion; —we fall far short of the integrity of the honest Syrian, who, though he was willing to shew a due respect to the person of his sovereign, yet scorned to sacrifice his heavenly allegiance to his earthly one, and, therefore, nobly avowed his resolution of offering neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice to any god but the Lord, though he was the subject of an idolatrous king, and in the land of an idolatrous people. Let us not, however, vainly imagine, that Religion consists in attachment to forms, or sects, or names, of any kind. If the principles we profess are founded on conviction of their truth, it is our duty steadily to adhere to them, without temporizing, or dissimulation: but if, as a wise author* expresses himself, we owe our Religion to the font in which we were baptized, or to the clime in which we were born, we are much mis-

* Vide Browne's Religio Medici.

taken,

taken, if we think we have a right to assume the honourable title of Christians. Let us, therefore, attend more to the essence than the forms of Religion; more to the practical duties which the Gospel clearly enjoins, than to the speculative opinions of fallible men; which may lead us into errors, uncertainty, or infidelity, but cannot forward us one step in the way, which leadeth to eternal life. Finally, suffer me to address you in the affectionate language of Joshua to the Israelites:—"Now, therefore, fear "the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and "truth, and put away the idols from among "you." And let your's be the noble answer of the same Israelites,—"God forbid that we "should forsake the Lord, to serve other "gods!"

SERMON XVII.

2 KINGS v. 20—27.

But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold my master hath spared Naaman the Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.

So Gehazi followed after Naaman: And when Naaman saw him running after him, he alighted down from his chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well?

And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets; give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.

And

And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants, and they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house, and he let the men go, and they departed.

But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither.

And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is this a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants?

The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow.

AN inspired Apostle tells us, "The love of "money is the root of all evil."—And this is true, not only with regard to those frauds and villanies, which it prompts men to commit, but also with regard to the miseries and evils which

which it draws upon them: and, therefore, the same apostle very justly adds, "Which, whilst "some have coveted after, they have pierced "themselves through with many sorrows."

Of both these the history of Gehazi affords us a very striking example. He no sooner saw the gold and the silver, which Naaman in vain had offered to his master, than his avaricious heart was set upon them: and no less readily had he recourse to fraud and villany to accomplish his purpose of partaking of them. But the resentment of the prophet and the vengeance of heaven as quickly succeed:—the rapacious plunderer, by a just sentence, is driven from the comfort of human society:—the unblushing liar is branded with the leprosy of Naaman, to be transmitted, as a memorial of his guilt, to his latest posterity.

But let us examine the circumstances of this transaction a little more particularly.

Naaman, having now obtained the wished-for cure of his leprosy, had taken leave of the prophet, and was returning to his own country. And, perhaps, upon this occasion it will not be easy to say, which was happier;—the Syrian, in having received the restoration of his health, and

and the conversion of his soul; or the prophet, in having displayed the generosity of his own heart and the power of his God. No doubt, too, the servants of Naaman had their share of pleasure in seeing their master return back to his country and expecting friends, free from that nauseous disorder which had rendered life a burden to him.

Amidst this general joy, Gehazi was the only discontented person. He had seen the treasures of Naaman, and, what was still more mortifying, he had seen them, too, refused by his disinterested master. This was too much, therefore, for his mercenary soul to bear. The venom of avarice rankled at his heart, and soon shewed itself in his actions. He coveted, and, therefore, he determined to obtain, some part of that wealth, which the grateful Syrian had brought to reward the prophet.

And here let us stop to observe, that there is no place, however sacred, which the devil will not enter, to lay his snares for the destruction of men. He entered into paradise to seduce our first parents, even when they were just come out of the hands of their Maker. He entered into Judas, when he was at supper with his heavenly Master. He overthrew the faith of Peter,

Peter, when he had even resolved to die with his Saviour. And, in the instance before us, he entered into the heart of Gehazi, when he was in the house of a prophet, and almost still in sight of the miraculous power of the God of Israel; who, he might well have supposed, was as mighty to destroy as to save.

How great need, therefore, have the children of God to be watchful, even in their best employments and most sacred retirements! The sanctuary of God himself is not always safe from impure thoughts, nor the closet of the saint secure from dangerous temptations. How much need, therefore, have we all to keep in mind the exhortation of the Apostle, "Watch and pray, "my brethren, lest ye enter into temptation."

No sooner had Gehazi formed this design, than he began to put it in execution.—"Be- "hold," says he, "my master hath spared "Naaman the Syrian, in not receiving at his "hands that which he brought; but as the "Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take "somewhat of him.—So Gehazi followed after "Naaman."

Naaman seeing Gehazi thus running after him, did not stay till he came up to him, but, to shew

shew his respect to the prophet, alights from his chariot to meet him, and greets him with this question, "Is all well?" To which Gehazi as readily answers, "All is well."

And was, indeed, all well? Did thy heart tell thee, thou faithless servant, that all was well, when thou wast deceiving the honest Syrian, and injuring thy kind master? Couldst thou fancy that all was well, because no human eye was witness to thy villany? Was not the eye of Providence looking down upon thee?—Say not, then, thou who imitatest the crimes of Gehazi, —All is well; because thou escapest the vengeance of man. Ask thy heart first, if all be well within.—Ask thy conscience, if all be well above. Thou mayest be safe here, indeed; but so long as the bleeding tears of injured innocence can witness against thee,—so long as the cries of the orphan and the fatherless can reach the throne of God,—be assured, that all is not well.

The rest of Gehazi's discourse is all a compound of fiction and falsehood, to cover his villany. He knew that the request he was going to make in the name of the prophet must appear somewhat strange to Naaman, after what had just before passed between them; and, therefore, to

to give a little colour of probability to it, he dresses up a fictitious story of the unexpected arrival of two young men of the sons of the prophets from mount Ephraim, to whom his master wished to pay a compliment by making them a present of a talent of silver and two changes of garments. And, to give the greater credit to his imposture, he pretends to make a conscience of exceeding his master's orders: so that Naaman is forced to urge him, before he can prevail upon his affected delicacy of honour, to accept of two talents.—"And he said, My master "hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there "be come to me from mount Ephraim two "young men of the sons of the prophets; give "them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two "changes of garments. And Naaman said, Be "content; take two talents. And he urged "him, and bound two talents of silver in two "bags, with two changes of garments."

You see that lying, then, was the great instrument of his avarice. And is it not still the same fatal instrument in the hands of all, who, like Gehazi, make haste to be rich?—It is painful to speak severe truths, but it would be criminal in a minister of the Gospel of truth to dissemble them.—Let me say, therefore, that no serious mind can look upon the various arts which are practised

practised in almost every branch of trade and commerce, without just indignation and concern. —Let me ask, and I ask it with a real sorrow, whether in this land of Christianity, for one that keeps within the bounds of truth in buying and selling, there be not thousands that have recourse to lies, frauds, and even perjuries?—Not that they had not rather grow rich by fair and honest methods: but the misfortune is, such methods are too slow to keep pace with their avaricious desires and immoderate expences; and, therefore, the buyer and seller are equally prompted by the same motives to circumvent and deceive. And so it unavoidably must happen:—for, so long as men are actuated by the base principles of Gehazi, they will also pursue the base arts of Gehazi.

Gehazi, having thus fraudulently obtained what he wished, his next care was to secure it. The sacred historian tells us, therefore, "when "he came to the tower, he took the two talents "of silver, and the changes of raiment, and "bestowed them in the house, and let the men "go, and they departed."

And now, his crime being compleated, his fears and anxieties begin. He had deceived Naaman, but he had still the dread of detection from

from his master.—And thus it ever will be with the conscious sinner. Guilt is restless and uneasy. Hence proceed those strugglings and inward conflicts of mind, which go before it; and those terrors and apprehensions, which follow after it:—the downcast look, and unsteady gait; the suspicious ear, and midnight paleness.

The better, however, to succeed in his design, this wicked wretch endeavours to conceal his crime by his impudence:—with an affectation of the intrepidity of conscious innocence, he went in, and stood before his master.

But Elisha, who well knew his guilt, soon found means to give a check to his impudence:—"Whence comest thou, Gehazi?"

How much Gehazi must be thunder-struck at this unexpected question, I leave you to judge. He endeavours, however, to recover himself, and with that ready assurance, which the father of lies never fails to bestow on his children, answers, "Thy servant went no whither."

But the prophet was not so to be deceived. To convince him, therefore, that he was no stranger to what had passed, he recapitulates the several circumstances of his guilt, and reproaches

and all our hypocrisies, lies, and secret sins, called forth by that God, who is able to bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart. And then will all the Gehazis of this world, the liars, the oppressors, and the covetous, appear in their proper colours before men and angels.

Think, therefore, when thou art tempted to conceal thy guilt by lying, what it will avail thee before Him, from whom no secrets are hid. When thou standest at the throne of God, and that dreadful question is proposed to thee; "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" will it avail thee any thing to answer, "Thy servant went "no whither?" Will such an answer deceive a God of knowledge, by whom all thy actions are weighed; whose heart goes with thee in every moment of thy life; who is about thy path and about thy bed, and spiest out all thy ways?—No: thou canst not fly from his presence, or go from his spirit.—If thou climb up into heaven; he is there: if thou go down into hell; he is there also: if thou couldest take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there also his hand should find thee, and his right hand should hold thee:—Shouldest thou say, Peradventure the darkness shall cover me; then thy night shall be turned

to day; yea, the darkness is no darkness with him, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and light to him are both alike.

Seeing then we have a God to deal with, who cannot be deceived, let us not vainly pretend to dissemble with him, or to deny our sins: let us rather approach him in the humiliating language of the prophet, "Righteousness belongeth unto "thee, O Lord, but unto us confusion of face;" knowing that "if we say that we have no sin, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in "us; but if we confess our sins, God is faith-"ful and just to forgive us our sins, and to "cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

SERMON XVIII.

2 PETER iii. 5.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up.

COULD we behold the dreadful forerunners of the day of judgment here described, we should want no other argument to excite our repentance, and warm our devotion. A world in flames, and a God descending to judgment, would appal even the boldest sinner, and make him cry out, in the language of the astonished jailor of old,—"What shall I do to be saved?"

Whence, then, is it, that this great and important event, which must one day certainly happen, makes so little impression upon us?

Why do we slumber on in our complicated sins and follies, when we cannot but know, not only that judgment is certainly hanging over our heads, but also that the day of the Lord may come, in an hour when we look not for it?

These are great and solemn questions, which all men are concerned to answer; and yet, I am afraid, no answer can be given to them, which will not reproach our folly. Those whom education and reflection have enabled to consider this great subject aright, want not additional arguments to strengthen their faith in this point. But the unlearned Christian,—the Christian, who has neither time nor talents for elaborate investigation,—will suffer me to lay before him, in terms suited to the plainest capacity, the folly and weakness of those various pretences, which lead men to disregard the awful impressions of a future day of account.

The first cause, which hinders men from sufficiently weighing the terrors of a judgment to come, is a spirit of infidelity. And what is this, in other words, but a spirit of the greatest folly and infatuation? For, if ever any truth was clear and undeniable; if ever any evidence was full and satisfactory; that of a future judgment must be so, to every impartial enquirer; whether we consider

consider it as founded on the information of scripture or the dictates of reason. Both the Old and New Testament unanimously represent it in the same colours, and under the same figures. Our Saviour has only explained what the prophets said of it before him: and this he did in the fullest manner. He constantly declared, both privately to his disciples and publicly to the world, that there would be such a judgment. He has described the preparatives and circumstances, with which it will be attended. He has told us the very terms, which the Judge will make use of in pronouncing sentence. And, that he might omit no confirmation which could add weight to so important a matter, he ratifies the truth of what he says, with a solemn asseveration, which he seldom uses but on such important occasions: "Verily "I say unto you, heaven and earth shall pass "away, but my words shall not pass away."

And this great truth is not confined to Revelation only: for all nations and all religions in the world have, in some sort, acknowledged it. It seems to be a notion inscribed on the hearts of men by the finger of Him that formed them, that there is a just and righteous God, who will reward virtue and punish vice. Hence it is, that to this judgment of God we see men, as it were, instinctively

instinctively appealing, in those solemn, but common expressions;—"God is my judge;—"He is witness that what I say is true;—to "Him I appeal." The same instinctive notion of a future judgment we always find to the great comfort of mankind under the injuries they suffer: it is the constant language of oppressed innocence,—"God searches my heart "and knows my innocence, and will do me jus-"tice, hereafter, for all the wrongs I suffer." What is it also but the same instinctive notion, which checks our vicious inclinations, and makes us afraid to commit sin? And when we have committed it, though we have escaped the censure of the world, and have been justified in the eyes of men; yet there is something within that tells us, all is not right; there is a hand-writing on the wall; there is a secret voice which alarms our fears, which makes us tremble and look pale in the dark hour of midnight; which whispers us, that we must one day stand before a Judge, who can neither be deceived nor eluded.

And whence then is this notion common to all the nations of the world, and extends itself through all ages? Can it be error? Can it be superstition? No: it is the voice of nature,—it is the language of reason, which points out an hereafter, the comfort of the virtuous and the terror

terror of the wicked.—Wretched they, who refuse to hear its dictates! who will not believe the power of an almighty Judge, till they see Him come, armed with tenfold terrors, to take vengeance on them that have not known Him!

A second cause, which hinders men from paying due attention to a future judgment, is the supposed distance of it. Distant evils, we all know, lose much of their due force: what may not happen till after a long course of years, we are apt to think may never happen. On this the sensual man builds all his hopes; the sinner all his dependence: he thinks the day of wrath is yet, perhaps, many ages off; and is ready to cry out with the scoffers of old,—"Where "is the promise of his coming? For since "the fathers fell asleep, all things continue "as they were from the foundation of the "world."

But, mistaken man, judgment is nearer than thou imaginest: for though the fatal hour in which God will finally judge the world is known only to the Father, and those to whom he will reveal it; yet every man knows, that we are every moment drawing nearer to that period, which will seal our eternal doom. The terrible signs of God's coming may not perhaps appear

to

to this generation, but for every man, as soon as death has closed his eyes, the predictions of it are all accomplished:—To him the sun is for ever darkened, and the heavens passed away; the elements are dissolved, and the earth, with all its works, vanished:—To him the book is opened, the events of his past life laid open to the all-searching eye of his Judge, and the sentence of eternal happiness or misery ready to sound in his ears. For in the grave there is no change to be made in our fate:—as the tree falls so it must lie to eternity; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge in the grave. To us, therefore, the grave is the beginning of judgment, and the nearer we approach to it, the nearer we are to falling into the hands of the living God. The day of judgment, then, cannot be far from every one of us. The eye of Providence may already have marked some of us for the unwelcome stroke of death:—the lot may be mine, or it may be thine. And were we sure of this;—could we see the uplifted hand of fate ready to smite us with its inevitable force,—with what confusion should we fly to God, lament our sins, implore his mercy, and spurn at all the temptations and vanities of the world.—Say, were we sure it should happen, even within a year, with what caution should we walk, with what earnestness should we pray, with what

fervency

fervency should we endeavour to work out our salvation?

And is it not probable, that some of us will be summoned to appear before the throne of God, ere twelve short months are expired? Are not our friends daily dropping around us? Has not the last year summoned some of them to pay the last tribute of nature? And as surely as the autumnal leaves annually overspread the ground, so surely will the lamp of life be soon extinguished in many of those, who now rejoice in its light. What folly then is it to be unprepared for an event, which cannot be far distant, and may be very near us; which certainly approaches by the inevitable steps of advancing age; and may come with the hasty and unlooked-for speed of a thief in the night!

To shew the unreasonableness of this spiritual procrastination still farther, let us consider how very different is the conduct of mankind on most other occasions. They are ever disposed to carry their fears of worldly evils too far, and wear out their lives in apprehension of imaginary danger. One man starves himself through fear of want in his latter days; another pines away in anxious solicitude for the future welfare of his children; a third dreads the loss of a friend or a fortune; thus

thus embittering life with the apprehension of events which may never happen, whilst they are regardless of that great event which infallibly must happen.

What a surprize, therefore, will it be to such men to see all these worldly fears, which gave them so much uneasiness, vanish away, and, in their stead, to find a judgment which was not in all their thought, and an eternity for which they have made no provision? With what grief and despair will it fill their souls, to have employed their time and care in providing for a perishable body, whilst the noble and immortal part was neglected and forgotten?

Fancy not, then, ye thoughtless flutterers, that carelessly sport on the ocean of life, that the hour of judgment is far off: it is no farther distant than the period of your lives; and how far that may be is known to God alone. But that it cannot be very remote, the repeated knells of departed spirits, and the sable train of sorrow that almost daily meets your eyes, will tell you; —and, that it may not be this very night; that the eye which sparkles with joy to-day, may not to-morrow be closed in eternal darkness;—which of us shall dare to say?

A third

A third thing, which hinders men from standing in awe of a future judgment, is, that they look round about them, and see that the generality of the world live in the same careless and irreligious manner with themselves. They are, therefore, apt to reason thus with themselves, if any uneasy forebodings of futurity arises in their breasts:—"If I am acting wrong, if I have any thing to "fear, there are thousands besides myself in the "same condition; I see we all tread much in "the same steps, and my life is as virtuous as "that of my neighbours:—why, therefore, should "I be more anxious about my future welfare "than they?"

But considerest thou not, O vain man, that thou wilt not be judged by other mens' actions, but thine own!—that it is not the custom of the world, which is to be the rule of thy conduct, but the commands of the Gospel;—not the example of men that is to be thy pattern, but that of Jesus Christ?—Think not, therefore, that a multitude of sinners will either justify thy commission of sin, or secure thee from the punishment of it. This may, indeed, happen among men, where the arm of justice is often too feeble to reach a combined multitude of offenders. But the Judge thou hast to fear, is not a man, but a God;—a God who is able to weigh the heavens

in a balance, and to whom the whole universe is but as a point. No power of numbers, therefore, will save thee from his just judgments. His avenging arm was able to drive a combined host of rebellious angels from heaven, and destroy a disobedient world by an irresistible deluge: how then shalt thou escape his power, or whither shalt thou flee from his presence?—Couldest thou climb up into heaven; he is there: Wilt thou go down into hell; he is there also: Couldest thou take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there also his hand can follow thee, and his right hand hold thee: Sayest thou, Peradventure the darkness shall cover me; the darkness is no darkness with him, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and light to him are both alike. Let not, then, example or multitude lead thee on to ruin. Wide, indeed, is the gate, and broad is the way, in which the multitude walk; but remember also, that it leadeth to destruction. Be it thy care, therefore, to enter in at the strait gate, which leadeth to eternal life, amidst the happy few that find it.

A fourth reason, which hinders men from fearing a future judgment, is a presumptuous dependence upon their good works. There are many, who live without committing any flagrant

or

or notorious sin, attend the outward ordinances of religion, exercise some moral virtues, perform some charitable and laudable actions. If these men, therefore, have any thing to fear, they think it is not for themselves, but for their neighbours:—they are grieved for the corruption of the age in which we live, are fearful of the welfare of mankind, are concerned to think, how thousands, whose destruction they have already pronounced, will answer before God. As for themselves, they have no fears:—they are children of grace, the elect of God: they depend upon their zeal for religion, and a life unpolluted with any notorious sin; they think their stretched-out hands and uplifted eyes will witness the sincerity of their devotion, and secure to them a place in heaven.

But this is that wicked presumption, which the Son of Syrach says, is sprung up to cover the earth with deceit. To be righteous overmuch, and despise others, is the language of the tabernacle and enthusiast, but it is not the language of Christianity and good sense. It was St. Paul's advice to the Philippians, to work out their salvation, not only with fear, but with trembling too. And yet these were the very Philippians, whom he commends for their alms, their works of charity, their constancy in suf-

fering persecution, and their patient taking the spoiling of their goods. Notwithstanding all which, he does not bid them fear for others, but for themselves; to work out their own salvation with fear, and to leave others to the mercy of their proper Judge. And with the same conscious humility, when David, the man after God's own heart, had watered his couch with penitential tears, and exercised himself in the law of God, day and night; all that he requires in return is, that the Almighty would not be too severe in his examination, too extreme to mark what is done amiss:—"Enter not," says he, "into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; "for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." Let no man, therefore, arrive at such a pitch of folly as to presume upon his own sufficiency, or to condemn others. It will be enough for him, that he can answer for himself at the day of judgment. It will, therefore, be his highest wisdom, and the best evidence of his religion, to think humbly of himself and charitably of others; knowing that all his own sufficiency is derived from the same God, to whose mercy their fallings are to be left.

Another reason, which hinders men from fearing a future judgment, arises from their belief, that the mercies of God are infinite; that he is

a being of unbounded goodness; that he did not create man to make him eternally miserable. Far be it from me to set limits to that mercy of God, which I, and every man living, shall too much stand in need of at the great day of account. God is, indeed, good: we see it every day; we feel it in every action of our lives; we are our very selves the fruit and offspring of his goodness, which called us out of nothing into life. But then, is he not also just as well as merciful? And will not that justice oblige him to punish unrepented sins? Where, then, is the false confidence of the sinner in the mercy of God? That mercy will, indeed, incline him to seek the conversion of the sinner in this life; but we should make a monster of him, and not a God, should we suppose him not to punish sin hereafter. He did not, indeed, create man upon the earth to make him miserable: but man may make himself so. Neither did he create the fallen angels with a design to make them miserable: yet we know, that they are reserved under chains of darkness for ever, having presumptuously abused the mercy of heaven. Let no man, therefore, presume upon the goodness of God too far. His mercies are the hope of the sincere, though infirm, Christian; but they are not the sanctuary of the wilful and deliberate sinner: they will rather be an aggravation of his

guilt, and add to that heavy sentence which awaits it; for they that despise his mercies, surely deserve most to feel his judgments.

Let, therefore, no false pleas, my brethren, or fallacious hopes, remove our thoughts from the terrors of a judgment to come. If there be any certainty in reason, or truth in revelation, we must one day stand together at the bar of a just God, where no deceitful pleas, or mask of hypocrisy, will avail us. If, therefore, we would escape the severity of God's judgments, and obtain a favourable sentence at that great day, we must prepare for its coming by a holy and virtuous life. We must often examine the state of our souls, and live continually in the fear of God. We must often retire from the cares of this vain world, and exercise our thoughts in the contemplation of a better. We must weigh all our actions in the balance of the sanctuary, and walk as strangers and pilgrims upon earth, upon which we have no abiding city. And, above all, we must daily prostrate ourselves at the throne of mercy, in a deep sense of our own unworthiness, saying with holy Job, "I am afraid of "all my sorrows; I know that thou wilt not "hold me innocent."

And

And then, when the day of the Lord cometh, though it be as a thief in the night; when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; when the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up; we shall not be afraid with any amazement, but shall cheerfully prepare to meet our Judge, who now sitteth at the right hand of God, to intercede for us, and to help our infirmities.

SERMON XIX.

2 TIM. i. 10.

But now is made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

IT is the peculiar unhappiness of mankind in general, to overlook, or be dissatisfied with, present blessings. Prone to change, and fond of novelty, their restless fancies are ever on the wing: regardless of what is in their power, they place their hopes of felicity in what is not so; and thus, hourly busied in the pursuit of fantastic enjoyments, or impossible attainments, should heaven and earth conspire to make them happy, they would, in spite of both, contrive to make themselves miserable.

And in nothing hath this perverse temper shewn itself more strongly, than in what relates to matters of religion. Favoured as they have been, at sundry times and in divers manners, with such illustrations of the divine will, as God's wisdom thought fit to bestow, or their own necessities required, they have still, in every period, found out something to repine at; some idle pretence for rejecting those means of happiness, which were graciously offered to them.

Thus the heathen, left to the guidance of reason and conscience, by whose laws he was to be judged, instead of pursuing their clear and unerring dictates, which pointed out the great lines of his duty in legible characters, spent his time in lamenting the ignorance of human nature, and complained of the want of some farther light to guide him, at the very time that he was shutting his eyes against that light, which God had given him already.

And the Jews were no less dissatisfied with their condition. They had, indeed, many important discoveries of revelation, superadded to the light of reason; they had Moses and the Prophets, from whom they might learn the clear will of God; yet all this availed nothing: they spent

spent their time in idle wishes for their expected deliverer; and neglecting that knowledge which God had vouchsafed to give them, cried out with the woman of Samaria, "the Messias "cometh, which is called Christ: when he is "come, he will tell us all things."

And now, when we have seen the accomplishment of this great event; when God, who, in times past, spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son, whom he raised from the dead; yet still the same perverse temper continues to operate, and the Christian is no less ready to reject the counsel of God against himself, than the blind heathen or stubborn Jew. He cannot, indeed, like them, complain of the want of a farther manifestation of God's will, and, therefore, steering a new course, he boldly denies the necessity of it: it is his aim to disparage that life and immortality which is brought to light through the Gospel, and, by magnifying the powers of reason, as sufficient for all the purposes of mankind, to destroy the credibility of revelation.

I hope, however, that, without entering into any direct proof of the truth of Christianity drawn from its external evidences, I shall be able

able to shew, in the following discourse, that the Christian revelation, though promulgated only by a handful of illiterate fishermen, carries with it such manifest proofs of its utility and importance to mankind, of its wisdom and consistency, of its superiority over every other system to be found in the Gentile and Jewish world, as will sufficiently demonstrate its divine original, and, therefore, should induce us to become not only almost, but altogether Christians.

The first excellence of the Christian revelation, which points out its divine original, consists in its having given us clear and satisfactory notions of God and his worship, which are the foundation of all religion.

We need not look far into the volumes of heathen antiquity to be convinced, how vague, uncertain, and absurd were the notions of all the gentile world concerning the nature and existence of a Deity. In the early ages of the world, the grossest degree of polytheism prevailed, which led men to pay divine honours to heroes and dæmons, or four-footed beasts and creeping things, nay even to vegetables, stocks, and stones. Strangers to the one true God, who dwelleth not in temples made with hands, they multiplied the number of their false

false ones to an almost incredible degree; insomuch that we are told by a very learned antient writer*, that not less than thirty thousand gods were worshipped within the walls of Rome.

Nor was their adoration of these deities less ridiculous and brutal, than their existence was false and fictitious. The same darkness of superstition, which drew men to worship these vanities of a distempered imagination, impelled them also to worship them in the grossest and most impure manner. Their sacred rites were a mixture of the most savage cruelty, the most abominable lewdness, and the most ridiculous buffoonery, that ever disgraced human nature: suited, indeed, to the monstrous and corrupt idols to whom they were addressed, but unworthy of that High and Lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity.

This species, however, of idol-worship, was too gross to gain credit or esteem in the more enlightened ages of the world. Its follies and absurdities were too glaring to stand the test of sober reason and philosophical enquiry. Accordingly, we find some faint attempts in a Plato

* Varro.

or

or a Socrates, to introduce something more refined and reasonable; either deduced from their own laborious researches, or, more probably, derived from some commerce with the Jewish writings or teachers. And, indeed, many others of the wiser sort, though in their outward practice they conformed to the superstitions of their country, yet, inwardly and in their writings, condemned and despised them. And how was it possible for them to do otherwise, amidst such a mass of debasing and inexplicable ideas of their attributes? But what then was the consequence of all this? They saw, indeed, the follies of these false gods: but the mists of prejudice and ignorance had so blinded their understandings, that they were still unable either to discover the true God, or to point out the relation he bore to man, or the service that was due to him from man. Instead, therefore, of growing wiser than their deluded forefathers, they either fell into total atheism or irresolute scepticism; either to acknowledge no God, or to doubt all.

Such was the state of the heathen world, a mixture of darkness, superstition, and doubt, even in the most enlightened ages, and when they had carried almost every species of knowledge, which depended not on divine revelation, to the highest degree of human perfection.

The

The Jews indeed, it must be acknowledged, had once clearer and better conceptions of the Deity. The Almighty had revealed himself to his chosen people, in plain and legible characters, and had given the most signal display of his glorious nature and attributes, both in his written word and the wonders of his providence. Yet all these were insufficient to preserve a gross and carnal people from falling into notions and practices unworthy of their divine Legislator. For, even in the earliest ages, when God himself condescended, as it were, to lead them by the hand, they were ever prone to sink into the idolatry of the neighbouring nations, and to cry out, "Make us gods, which shall go before us." And, in later times, their Rabbis, and wise men falsely so called, had grafted so many superstitions upon the pure worship of the God of their fathers, that the Jewish faith and ritual were little purer than the belief and services of gentile authority.

It remained, therefore, for the Christian doctrine to bring life and immortality to light, by banishing these false and pestilential notions, and to lead men to right conceptions of their religious belief and duty, by acquainting them with the real nature and perfections of the one true God, and the necessary consequences of them:

them: and this it has done in the plainest and most effectual manner, by assuring us, that there is one eternal, independent, unchangeable, omnipresent, infinite, all-wise, all-powerful Being, without body, parts, or passions, without beginning or end of days, the maker, preserver, and governor of all things, of infinite goodness, justice, and truth, endued with every moral and natural perfection, in whom we live, move, and have our being; whom, therefore, we are bound to love, adore, and obey, with the most fervent affection, the most profound reverence, the most unfeigned humility, and the most pure and refined sentiments of a devout heart.

It farther points out to us his existence in the character of three persons, united in one God; to each of whom we stand in a peculiar relation, though we cannot fathom or comprehend their mysterious essence; to the Father, as our creator and parent; to the Son, as our redeemer from sin and death; and to the Holy Spirit, as the sanctifier of our hearts, the comforter of our drooping spirits, and our guide into all truth.

This is a description of the Deity, so new and before unheard of, so full and satisfactory, so agreeable to the pure dictates of our reason and understanding, as is sufficient to banish all

erroneous

erroneous and false conceptions, to satisfy the most inquisitive mind, to impress the most humble and reverential awe, to excite the most fervent love and gratitude, and to inspire every considerate man with a sincere desire of approving himself and his conduct to so great and good a Being. Just reason, therefore, have we both to believe, and to be thankful for, the Gospel revelation, which has brought us out of darkness into this glorious light, by making known to us the one true God, of whom are all things, and by pointing out to us that just, pure, and reasonable service we owe to him.

A second excellence of the Christian religion consists in its having pointed out a clear and satisfactory method, by which sinners may be entitled to pardon, and restored to the lost favour of God: a point of the utmost importance to the happiness of mankind, and yet very little known either to the Jewish or Gentile world.

It was, indeed, ardently to be wished for by the weakness of human nature, and justly to be hoped from the goodness of God, that he would be reconciled to offending sinners: but, when men began to consider by what particular way this reconciliation was to be effected, human nature was at a stand, and the beams of hope were

were over-clouded by the gloom of despondency. For should the sinner confess himself to the Almighty, and profess obedience for the future: still that obedience must ever be imperfect, and, therefore, must itself stand in need of pardon. And, even if it were possible to be perfect, yet it could be no reparation for sins already committed, and therefore could give no just assurance or comfort to a mind loaded with the stinging sense of past guilt; much less afford any hope of that life and immortality, after which the mind of man naturally aspires with irresistible longings, and without which, life and its best enjoyments would become tedious and insupportable.

Amidst, therefore, this anxious state of uncertainty and solicitude, we cannot wonder to find the poor trembling gentile flying to every species of superstition, which offered one ray of hope, or could afford one moment's ease to a distracted mind. The first, which naturally offered itself, was that of a vicarious atonement: and hence that multitude and variety of sacrifices, which overspread the earth, as mens fears or humours led the way. The uncertainty of all expedients led them to try every expedient: they were all ready to cry out in the language of the prophet, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, "and

" and bow myself before the high God? Shall " I come before him with burnt-offerings, with " calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased " with thousands of rams, or with ten thou- " sands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first- " born for my transgression, the fruit of my " body for the sin of my soul?" And yet, after all their enquiry, they were still left in the same state of perplexing uncertainty about the placability of the Deity and the pardon of their own guilt. For, however satisfactory these bloody rites might be to the unthinking multitude, the wiser part saw, and plainly confessed, that man could have no claim to forgiveness, from offering to God what was already his own by right of creation; that there was no visible or necessary connection between the act and the end proposed; and that, therefore, it was not possible to imagine, that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin.

Such was the dreadful uncertainty of the gentile world in this important article. The Jews, it must be owned, were in a much more desirable situation, and had much clearer information. They had their legal expiations and atonements, ordained by God himself, to cleanse and purify the people, as types and shadows of that one great sacrifice, which, in due time, was to be

offered for the sins of the whole world. Yet even these, we have apostolic authority to say, could never make the comers thereunto perfect: they could, indeed, remove the temporal punishment of smaller offences, and legal offerings could purge away legal transgressions; but for those moral violations of duty, which draw down the wrath of heaven; those greater crimes which gall and wound the conscience, which fill the soul with fears and terrors; for that vengeance which awaited them in another life, no atonement was found; neither "gifts nor sacrifices "could expiate them, nor make him who did "the service perfect, as pertaining to the con-"science."

Is it not, therefore, an invaluable blessing and privilege that Christians know their redemption by Jesus; that they are freed from all those fears and terrors, which must ever oppress a guilty soul; that, amidst all their anxiety, they can fly to the extended arms of his mercy, with full assurance that their Almighty Father will accept their penitential tears, and their reddest sins shall be washed away in the blood of the everlasting covenant, through his merits, whom "God hath exalted with his "right-hand, to be a prince and a Saviour, to "give repentance and forgiveness of sins."

A third excellence of the Christian religion consists in its giving us an assurance of the aids and comforts of the Holy Spirit.

The infirmity of human nature has been the subject of just complaint in all ages; a complaint in which Jews and Gentiles have equally joined. So feeble is the guiding hand of reason, and so violent the sallies of head-strong passion, that the greater part of mankind, without resistance, gave up the unequal struggle, and resigned themselves to the impulses of corrupt nature. And even those, who saw the necessity of resisting the fury of lawless passion; who listened to the invisible monitor within them, and were sincerely desirous of conforming to the light of reason; yet were forced to lament the insufficiency of human strength, and to acknowledge its inability to carry them through the whole compass of their duty. And, indeed, so many are the dangers to which human weakness is exposed from our own hearts, which are deceitful above all things; from the influence of example or the snares of surprise; from the power of desire or the cogency of distress; from the allurements of hope or the depressions of fear; that he must either have a very imperfect knowledge of the world, or a very overweening opinion of himself, who hopes to rise superior

to every temptation, and to make his conduct conformable to the line of his duty.

It is, therefore, surely, of all consolations to a serious mind the greatest, to be assured of the ever-present aid of the Holy Spirit of God, to guard us in the hour of temptation, to strengthen the weakness of our nature, to stimulate our languishing affections, to curb our unruly desires, to warn us of our dangers, and to guide us through the dark mazes of a deceitful world to eternal happiness. And this consolation the Christian religion affords us in the strongest manner, by assuring us that our heavenly Father will give this Holy Spirit to them that ask him in sincerity and faith. And well may we, therefore, cry out with the enraptured Apostle, "thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory "through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

A fourth excellence of the Christian religion consists in its clearly discovering to us a future state of eternal rewards and punishments.

How far this important point is discoverable by the light of reason, and how far it was discovered by the gentile world, has afforded ample matter of dispute among the learned. On the one hand, it must be allowed, that some of the wiser

wiser heathens expressed very strongly their persuasion of a life to come, in which the unequal distributions of Providence in this life would be corrected by unerring justice. But, on the other, it cannot be denied, that this belief was founded upon no certain promise of the Deity, and, therefore, could only be matter of opinion at the best; that it was chiefly held out to view, as a motive to enforce the practice of virtue in this life, for the benefit and happiness of society; that it was totally unknown to many nations, and to the lower class of people in all; that it was steadily denied by some whole sects of philosophers; and, lastly, that, even among the wisest and best enquirers, it was mixed with great doubt and perplexity, so as at times to stagger their hopes, and confound their most laboured deductions of reason.

That the Jewish law was founded only upon temporal promises, and confirmed by temporal sanctions, we need but open our bibles to be convinced. Health, length of days, a numerous offspring, and affluence of the comforts of the present life, is all that is promised to the righteous: sickness, calamity, want, deprivation of life and issue, is all that is threatened to the sinner. And, though there can be no doubt, that the antient and wiser Jews had a full confidence

of future and eternal happiness, founded either upon some clear traditional promise of God, or upon a secondary and spiritual sense which they put upon some general promises contained in their scriptures;—yet Josephus himself owns that the generality of them, who looked not beyond the letter of the law, either saw not, or were little influenced by, a distant and future expectation *.

To the Gospel therefore, and to the Gospel alone, we must go for a clear and general discovery of a future state, which can alone explain and unravel the œconomy of providence in this. And there our warmest expectations will not be disappointed. It will tell us, in plain and legible characters, that the present life is but a state of trial and probation, and, therefore, a mixture of sorrow and joy, wickedness and virtue, folly and wisdom; that our hopes and views will not perish in the grave; but that there shall be a resurrection, both of the just and of the unjust; and that the righteous Governor of the world hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained.

* Vide Joseph. Antiq. Jud. l. xviii. c. 2.

Whilst,

Whilst, therefore, with pity we look back upon the nations who were ignorant of eternal life, and wandered amidst perplexities and shadows; whilst we sympathize with those bitter pangs they must have felt, when they successively committed their dearest friends to the grave or funeral pile, without any hope of ever meeting them again; whilst we consider that dark night of ignorance and despair, in which we ourselves must have remained, had all our hopes terminated in the grave;—what just reason have we to cry out with the fervent gratitude of the Apostle, "Blessed be the God and Fa-"ther of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according "to his abundant mercy has begotten us again "to a lively hope, through the resurrection of "Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inherit-"ance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth "not away, reserved in heaven for such as are "kept through faith unto salvation."

A fifth excellence of the Christian religion consists in its affording us a most perfect rule of life and manners, by recommending to our practice "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever "things are honest, whatsoever things are just, "whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things "are lovely, whatsoever things are of good re-"port." And this it has done in a manner far

exceeding the most refined precepts of wisdom ever before delivered either to the Jewish or gentile world.

To point out the numerous and fundamental errors of the several sects of philosophers,—to trace the insufficiency of human wisdom, even in a Plato or a Socrates,—to mark the defective and partial morality of Judaic obstinacy, would be a long and arduous task; but a brief recapitulation of a few leading particulars will abundantly suffice to shew the superior excellence of the Gospel, as a rule of life and manners, in the several branches of our duty, whether they relate to God, to our neighbour, or to ourselves.

The religious rites of the gentile world, we have already seen, were a mixture of cruelty, obscenity, and superstition, suited to the monstrous objects, whom they worshipped under the name of Gods, and to the gross conceptions of their blind and corrupt adorers. And, though the Jewish worship was free from the base and idolatrous pollutions of heathenism, yet, in compliance with the carnal notions of a stubborn nation, ever prone to idolatry, and hankering after sensible objects of worship, it was burthened with cumbrous ceremonies and observances, with external rites and corporeal services; useful,

ful, indeed, to a depraved generation, but derogatory from the majesty of God. But the Christian religion, by teaching us that God is a spirit, and, therefore, is to be worshipped only in spirit and truth, has at once cut off all pretences for external expressions of our reverence, farther than as they minister to, or proceed from, the internal reverence of a devout mind. It commands us, therefore, not to offer to him the blood of slain beasts, but the better sacrifice of an humble and contrite heart:—not to circumcise the flesh, but the spirit, with the lusts and passions thereof:—not to observe new moons and sabbaths, but to keep the weightier matters of the law, mercy, judgment and truth:—not to abstain from the leaven of bread, but from the leaven of malice and wickedness:—not to make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but to cleanse the extortion and excess that is within:—in one word, to shew our reverence of the Supreme Being, not by positive and ritual observances, or corporeal severities, but by pure and undefiled hearts; by a meek and gentle spirit; by unfeigned contrition for our past sins; by sincere gratitude for the blessings we have received; by a humble submission to his will; by a steady obedience to his commands; and by a firm reliance upon his providence, amidst all the changes and chances of this

this mortal life. This is the worship commanded in the Gospel,—this the adoration of a Christian:—pure, rational, and easy; equally removed from the unhallowed abominations of gentile corruption, and the burthensome pomp of Judaic observances.

Nor is the Gospel doctrine less excellent in the several branches of duty, which relate to our neighbour and ourselves. For what virtue is there, which can make perfect the man of God, which is not there taught and enjoined, in its utmost purity and extent?—Was it said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill? The Gospel cutteth off all tendency to murder, by expressly forbidding all causeless anger against our brother, all contemptuous treatment, or even harsh and hasty condemnation of him; which are generally the forerunners of this black and horrid crime.—Was it said to them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery? The Gospel not only forbids the adulterous act, but all adulterous thoughts;—commands us to restrain the first incentives to lust, by plucking out the adulterous eye;—declaring, that "whosoever "looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath "already committed adultery with her in his "heart."—Was it said to them of old time, "Thou shalt not foreswear thyself, but shalt "perform

"perform unto the Lord thine oaths?" The Gospel not only forbids perjury, but all rash, vain, and idle swearing, as proceeding from an evil principle, and as being derogatory from the reverence due to the Supreme Being.—Was it said to them of old time, "An eye for an eye, "and a tooth for a tooth?" The Gospel forbids us to harbour any revengeful thoughts, requires us to bear small injuries with patience, and even to suffer the greatest without malice or anger.—Was it said to them of old time, "Thou shalt "love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy?" The Gospel, on the contrary, commands us to love all men, even our very enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us:—in one word, in all circumstances of life, to do to others what we would they should do unto us; as being all members of the same family, all children of the same God, all subject to the same common infirmities, and, therefore, all standing in need of mutual forbearance and forgiveness.

Nor is the morality of the Gospel less new and perfect in other instances, which relate more immediately to ourselves. It commands us to banish all selfish passions; to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts; to keep our faculties in their

their due subordination to reason; to hunger and thirst after righteousness; to be meek and lowly in heart; to despise the riches of the world; to set our affections on things above; to bear evil without repining, and good without presumption; to be contented in our station; in one word, to be patterns and examples of righteousness, sobriety and godliness, and to endeavour to be perfect, even as our Father, which is in heaven, is perfect.

Such are the practical duties taught and enjoined by the Christian religion; which contain all the morality of former times, augmented, refined, and improved; digested into one clear and uniform system; enforced by the wisest and most cogent motives; delivered in the most pathetic, intelligible, and persuasive language; and suited to every man's particular circumstances, station, and capacity in life.

And, lastly, what is another excellence of the Christian religion, it affords us the noblest examples of the practicability of these duties, in the lives of its divine author and his disciples.

Had the Christian religion been the product of sequestered wisdom and inactive speculation; had it been taught, like the philosophy of old, only

only in porticos and groves, we might, we must have admired it as a most ingenious and sublime theory:—but we should never, perhaps, have thought of executing what it enjoined, or of reaching that excellence we admired. We should have been apt to have considered it as the baseless fabric of a vision, beautiful, but unsubstantial; pleasing to the imagination, but useless to the common purposes of life. But when we see all its precepts drawn forth into action, and humanity able to do what divinity taught;—when we behold our great Lawgiver submitting to his own laws, and himself performing what he requires of others;—when we see him meek and lowly in heart, submitting to poverty, insult, tortures and death, without complaint or murmur;—nay, what is more, when we see men of like passions with ourselves, poor, illiterate, timid fishermen and mechanics, reaching the sublimest heights of this pure religion, and practising its most arduous duties amid the corruptions and opposition of the world;—our opinion must then be changed, and we can have no pretence either for denying the truth of Christianity, or the possibility of becoming Christians indeed. And such examples almost every page of the New Testament holds forth to our view; it shews us a set of men called forth to almost unparelleled trials and sufferings, for a long

long course of years, without any support but what they derived from their religion; and yet, amidst them all, firm and unshaken, resisting every solicitation of sense; struggling against natural infirmity; opposing the combined powers of prejudice, interest, and superstition; rejecting, with a noble disdain, every overture of present ease and temporal advantage, and at last submitting with joy and transport to death and ignominy; animated with a firm persuasion of the heavenly truths they defended, and the glorious prospect of an eternal reward. Such examples as these carry with them irresistible conviction of the truth and practicability of the duties of Christianity; and, whilst its precepts teach us what we ought to be, its examples still more strongly demonstrate what we may be.

And now then, if the Gospel be thus profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;—if it has recovered us from a state of ignorance, guilt, and corruption;—if it has given the purest and sublimest ideas of the divine nature;—if it contains the most perfect rule and exemplification of all our moral and religious duties;—if it promises the most powerful assistances in the discharge of them;—if it opens a view of the noblest rewards, to animate our hopes and encourage our perseverance:

verance:—to what shall we attribute the erection and support of so glorious a fabric, but to the finger of God himself, signally displayed for the instruction and happiness of a world buried in savage ignorance and brutal corruption? What shall we think of those, who would ascribe so wonderful and unheard-of a display of wisdom, illumination and eloquence, to the unassisted efforts and invention of a despised carpenter's son, and a group of illiterate fishermen, without any one prospect of advantage to themselves, or, rather, with every prospect before their eyes of certain death and inevitable torments? And, lastly, what shall we think of those unhappy men, who reject this life and immortality, who shut their eyes against the glorious light, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, and would bring us back from the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, to the dark conjectures and gloomy expectations of unassisted reason? What can we think, but that either they have not sufficiently considered these strong and irrefragable evidences of Christianity, or, what is more probable, that the God of this world, their corrupt lusts and passions, has so blinded their eyes, that seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not understand.

But,

But, whilst with pity we look down upon these unhappy men, who reject the counsel of God against themselves, let us look up with gratitude to heaven for those blessings we enjoy. And the best way of shewing our gratitude is, by living agreeably to that light, which he hath given us. For, if we do in earnest endeavour to lay hold on that eternal life which is offered to us,—if we sincerely labour to walk as children of the light,—if to our knowledge we add temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity;—we then shall answer his gracious purpose in delivering us from the power of darkness, and translating us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

But, on the contrary, if we are wicked or careless,—if we walk as other gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them,—our greater knowledge will be so far from being an advantage to us, that it will only serve to increase our condemnation. For, as it has been excellently observed, "though we "certainly have the best religion in the world, "yet we as certainly are in the worst condition "of all mankind, if that religion does not make "us good."

Be

Be it our care, therefore, to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, having our loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness, and our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; that when Christ, who is our chief shepherd, shall appear, we may also appear together with him in glory, and be partakers of that blessed life and immortality, which he hath graciously brought to light through the Gospel.

SERMON XXO

MATT. xi. 4, 5.

Jesus answered and said unto them, Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them.

THE Christian Religion, in whatever light it is considered, carries with it such undeniable marks of supernatural power and wisdom, as will leave us no room to doubt of its divine original. The purity of its doctrines, the reasonableness of its precepts, the excellence of its motives, the spotless innocence and integrity of its Author, do all with concurring force proclaim it to be the mighty power of God unto salvation. But, having already attentively considered the force of this internal evidence of the truth of

Christianity; I shall now proceed to examine the external evidence, arising from miracles and prophecy.

And 1st, The positive and direct proof of our Saviour's divine commission, are the various miracles, which he wrought in confirmation of his doctrines. To these, therefore, we find him constantly appealing, as the strongest and most irrefragable evidence of his heavenly power and authority; as speaking fully and clearly to the senses of mankind, and, therefore, not to be eluded by any sophistry or evasion of perverse or designing men. Thus, when the Jews sought to kill him, "because he said that God was his "Father, making himself equal with God;" he tells them, that he might, indeed, appeal to the testimony of John the Baptist, for the truth of what he had said: But why, says he, need I do this?—"I have a greater witness than that "of John: for the works which the Father hath "given me to finish, the same works that I do, "bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent "me." Thus also, in the instance before us, when John himself sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, "Art thou he that should come," that is, the promised Messias, "or look we for "another?" he does not return a direct answer, but appeals to the miracles which he wrought before

before their eyes, as a sufficient answer to this enquiry: "Go, and shew John again those "things which ye do hear and see: The blind "receive their sight, and the lame walk, the "lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the "dead are raised up, and the poor have the "Gospel preached unto them:" As if he had said,—The scriptures of the Old Testament foretold, that the Messias should be endued with a divine power from above, by which "the eyes "of the blind should be opened, the ears of the "deaf unstopped, the lame man should leap as "an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing:" These things ye now see fulfilled before your eyes this day: ye can, therefore, have no doubt of my divine commission; ye must, indeed, be convinced, that I am He that should come; the Deliverer so long promised to your fathers.

Thus we see that our Saviour thought the works which he did a sufficient evidence of his divine power, and of the truth of his religion. And, indeed, abundantly sufficient they are to every candid and unprejudiced enquirer after truth. But, in this age of scepticism and licentiousness, there have not been wanting some, who will not acknowledge their force, and have even impiously dared to call in question the truth and reality of those miracles, which are recorded

to have been wrought by our Saviour and his disciples, and to ascribe the progress of the Gospel, not to the finger of God, extraordinarily displayed in its support, but to a combination of natural and ordinary causes.

Though I am persuaded, therefore, that I am principally addressing myself to those who believe the Gospel, and, therefore, acknowledge the hand of God to have been visibly displayed in the support of the religion we profess; yet, I hope, it will not be deemed an useless or unnecessary task to examine at large the grounds upon which these pretended doubts are founded, lest the sophistry of a Gibbon should be mistaken for argument, or the reveries of a Rousseau pass for unanswerable demonstration; and to shew that we have the most incontestible proof, that the blind did indeed receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard, and the dead were raised up.

And 1st, It has been pretended, that the persons on whom, or before whom, the miracles of our Saviour were performed, might possibly be imposed upon by some fraud or artifice.

To this I answer, that there appears not the least shadow of foundation for such a supposition

tion as this. For, as our Saviour's miracles were plain matters of fact, and an appeal to the outward senses, it is impossible that men should be so imposed upon without expressly contradicting what they both heard and saw. Can we suppose that a father, whose beloved son lies at the point of death, can be mistaken, when he hears our Saviour, who was not present, say, "Go "thy way, thy son liveth;" and finds that "from that hour the fever left him?" Can a whole company be deceived, when they see a man that was dead, and laid four days in the grave, raised to life by the authority of a word, —"Lazarus, come forth?" Can a vast multitude be cheated, when they see no less than five thousand men fed with five barley loaves and two small fishes, and twelve baskets filled with the fragments, which remained over and above? or can we suppose that they would have followed Jesus, if they had not known the miracle to be real? Is it, again, possible for a woman diseased with an issue of blood for twelve years, not to know that she was healed? Could the paralytic man possibly be ignorant, that the use of his limbs was restored to him? Can a man that is born blind receive his sight, and not be sensible of the change? Can ten men that are lepers be cleansed, and sent to the priest to offer sacrifice; and all this in imagination only?—the

baseless fabric of a vision?—Is it possible, that all the world could be deluded, when they saw such numbers possessed with devils, restored to their right mind, who before wandered about in frantic rage or gloomy despondency?—But, why do I multiply words? There is not one of the miracles recorded in the Gospel, which can be fairly charged with any appearance of fraud; and many of them are done with such corroborating circumstances of truth and authenticity, as would call forth a blush, if denied, upon the hardened brow of infidelity itself.

But, 2dly, Some have pretended to object, that those, whom we call Dæmoniacs, fancied themselves possessed with devils, when in reality they were not. Should we allow this to have been true in some later instances, in a church notorious for its impostures, surely it can weigh nothing against those who were possessed with devils in the time of our Saviour. For where is the improbability that God, when he sent his Son into the world to destroy the works of the devil, should providentially so order it, that the devil and his angels should visibly possess the bodies of men, that Christ might openly triumph over the powers of darkness, and demonstrate that all power was given to him over things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the

the earth? But if we pretend to conclude, because some men have falsely fancied that they were possessed with devils, that, therefore, there never was any dæmoniacs; we might with equal propriety conclude, because some gloomy mortals torment themselves with imaginary maladies, that there never was any real sickness or distemper. Whereas the truth is, as men would never have been haunted with the terrors of imaginary maladies, if they had never known real ones; so they would never have dreamt of being possessed with devils, if there had been no real dæmoniacs. But, even if we should grant, that these, whom we call dæmoniacs were only epileptic, or otherwise disordered persons, this concession will no way affect either the greatness or credibility of the miracle wrought upon them: for surely to restore health to the sick, by a word, and without the application of human means, is as much a contradiction to the established laws of nature,—that is, is as much a miracle,—as to cast out devils.

It is objected, thirdly, That since faith was required in those that were healed, it is likely, that as fancy occasioned the disorders of some, so fancy also accomplished the recovery of others. Should we allow this supposition, for once, not to be an absolute contradiction to the known

known laws of cause and effect; we may ask in return, what can be a greater miracle than to give a man such strength of imagination, as will immediately cure a stubborn and inveterate disease, without any danger of a relapse? But if, indeed, imagination has such power as is pretended over the bodies of men, it must surely seem a little strange, even to infidels themselves, that no similar effect was ever produced at any other period of time; that men still labour under a thousand tormenting disorders, and that no one unhappy sufferer has been able to restore himself to health and ease, by virtue of so pleasing and powerful a remedy as a strong and sportive imagination, which often falls to the lot even of the weakest of the human race.

But the folly of this, as well as of many other objections, against the truth of revealed religion, plainly shews the true spirit and genius of infidelity. Its advocates pretend that they receive or reject nothing through prejudice, but that they cannot embrace what they cannot comprehend. And yet they scruple not to attribute the miraculous cures of our Saviour to the power of imagination; as if it were easier to believe that mens' fancies can cure the most inveterate diseases, than that they were cured by the supreme God, as an infallible testimony to the doctrine

doctrine and mission of his Son. What is this but the most wilful opposition to God and truth! What is it, but, like the sinners of old, to prefer darkness to light; and, we may add, for the same reason too,—because their deeds are evil!

But after all, though our Saviour generally required Faith as a necessary condition in them that were to be healed; yet we find that he wrought many miracles without this condition. Thus, in a storm at sea, he rebukes the wind and waves; and immediately there is a great calm. This then surely will not be attributed to any faith or power of imagination in the elements that obeyed his voice. Was it, again, the operation of fancy that made the barren fig-tree wither away at his word?—Dead men surely were not raised to life by their faith; nor can we suppose that the faith of a father could operate upon a son, who never saw Christ, and yet was healed by him.—" O faithless and perverse " generation, how long shall I be with you, " how long shall I suffer you," were the express words of our Saviour to the multitudes that requested the performance of a miracle; and yet he granted their request. Though faith, therefore, was generally required in those that came to be healed; yet we see, that he could as easily work their cure without it: so that, when we find

find it written, "he did not many mighty "works in his own country, because of their "unbelief;" we are not to understand that their unbelief shortened the power of his almighty arm, that he was unable to do any miracle; but that they wanted that condition, which might make it fit for him to do any; that teachableness and humility of disposition, which might render them proper objects for the exertion of his miraculous power and benevolence.

But, since the reality of those surprising operations, which we call miracles, cannot be denied; it has, 4thly, been pretended, that the persons, on whom these miracles seemed to be wrought, might be privy to the imposture, and concur with Christ in deceiving the world. But, what a wild and ridiculous supposition is this! Did any man ever undertake or support an imposture without some temptation, some prospect of interest or advantage to himself? And what advantage could either Christ or his followers propose to themselves by imposing upon the world? Did not they live in poverty, and die in misery? Did not they know and foretell, that all manner of sufferings awaited them, for the doctrines they professed? Did not, again, those very doctrines expressly forbid all manner of lies, fraud, and imposture, under the penalty of

of eternal torments? Where then could be the probability or the temptation of supporting an imposture, which, if their own principles were true, they were sure to die for here, and to be damned for hereafter?

But, suppose that Christ and his apostles had conspired with some fallacious impostors to deceive the world; yet the winds and elements could not be in the secret, when they obeyed the voice of their heavenly Master. Had the herd of swine, into whom the unclean spirits entered, conspired together to deceive the world, when, contrary to the principle of self-preservation, which operates in every creature, they ran violently down a steep place, and perished in the waters? Did men counterfeit themselves blind from their mother's womb, lame or paralytic before Christ was born, that they might afterwards countenance an imposture by seeming to be healed by his assistance?

Were not, again, these miracles performed in a manner the most remote from suspicion of imposture,—in the face of the sun, and in sight of great multitudes? Was it a fit time to act an imposture, in raising the widow's son to life, when the bier was followed by a great company, and much people of the city was with her? Was

not that city too a noted and populous one, where the fact might easily have been contradicted, if it had been false?

But, for a decisive argument that there was no imposture in the case, we need only to appeal to the testimony of the Jews themselves, who cannot be suspected of favouring the cause of Christianity. Christ and his apostles, we well know, made it their constant business to overturn the superstitious customs of the Jews, and to abolish the legal rites and ceremonies, which had their final accomplishment in him. The Jews, therefore, of course, would not be wanting, and, in fact, we know, were not wanting, in their endeavours to sift his authority to the utmost, and to fix upon him some brand of imposture, to vilify him, and to justify their own infidelity. And surely we cannot pretend, that they wanted the means of detecting the imposture, if any had really been.—The testimony of the shepherds, who heard a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and celebrating the birth of the new-born Saviour;—the coming of the wise men from the East, to adore him;—the miraculous birth of John the Baptist, his forerunner;—the punishment of Zacharias for his want of faith;—the descent of a dove in a bodily shape, the heavens opened and a voice declaring from heaven,

heaven, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased;—these are all circumstances, surely, which could neither escape their notice, nor elude their enquiry; since the time and place of their happening are expressly mentioned. It was surely easy for them to inform themselves of what passed at Gennezaret, Capernaum, Jericho or Bethany, places not remote, and from whence numbers came every year, as was the custom of the Jews, to celebrate the feast of the Passover. They could not be ignorant upon what mountain, or in what year, Christ taught, or who were the witnesses of the many miracles performed by him, which filled all Judæa with his fame. They must know who Jairus was, as being a great man, and one of the rulers of the synagogue. They could not but know the country of the Gergesenes, and, therefore, might scrutinize the truth of the miraculous destruction of the herd of swine. They might easily be informed of the synagogue and of the sabbath day, when he healed the woman "who "had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and "was bowed together, and could in no wise "lift up herself." They might find out the Pharisee, in whose house Christ healed the man that had the dropsy.—Could none of those multitudes be found, whose sick Jesus healed, when they followed him into a desert place apart? Could

Could he drive the buyers and sellers out of the temple without their knowing it? Did not the children in the temple proclaim his power, by crying out, Hosanna to the Son of David? Was not the multitude so great at Capernaum, that they were forced to uncover the roof of the house where he was, to let down a man sick of the palsy? Did not he, even in Jerusalem itself, perform so many signal miracles, that many of the people believed on him, and said, "When "Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than "these, which this man hath done?" Did he not, even to the last, shew this miraculous power in the sight of thousands, by healing the ear of Malchus, when they came with swords and staves to seize him as a thief and a malefactor? —But the time would fail me, should I repeat all the miracles, which Jesus is recorded to have done within the reach of the knowledge of the Jews: and yet even these are but a small part of his miraculous works; for one of the evangelists expressly tells us, "There are also many "other things which Jesus did, the which if "they should be written every one, I suppose, "that even the world itself could not contain "the books that should be written."

Amidst this glaring multiplicity of facts, then, it cannot be pretended, that the Jews were ignorant

rant of our Saviour's miracles, or wanted the necessary means and opportunities of examining the truth of them. And as little can it be pretended, that they wanted inclination to have detected the fraud and fallacy of them, had there been any room for them to do so. For surely they, who were so forward to slay the Lord of life, would not have been backward to justify their cruelty, by murdering his reputation too. They would have painted in glowing colours the artifices of him and his followers, and with pleasure have transmitted them down to the latest posterity. And yet we do not find any traces of such information, in any of the Jewish writings.—What then can be the reason of this?

The truth is, they could not, they dared not, deny the miraculous operations of Christ and his followers: they were wrought in the sight of thousands, and, therefore, were not to be denied. They might with equal modesty have questioned the shining of the sun at noon-day. What, therefore, could not be denied, they foolishly attempted to disparage. In order, therefore, to lessen the credit and weight of our Saviour's miracles, we find the Jewish writers ridiculously ascribing them to the power of magic, or to the art of pronouncing the name of God in a mys-

rious manner. Can there be a greater evidence of the authenticity of our Saviour's miracles, than that his bitterest enemies and murderers, the Jews, who lived in the very time and country of their performance, could not, dared not, to call them in question?

To this testimony of the Jews we may add that of Julian the Apostate, and of the heathen philosophers. The former had been initiated into all the mysteries of the Christian religion from which he revolted, and therefore well knew, if it was founded on false facts and imposture; and the latter, out of hatred to Christianity, which struck at the root of their favourite idolatry, used every art which wit could invent or malice execute, to abolish it: and yet neither of them dared to deny the miraculous facts upon which it was grounded. They well knew that such an attempt would only expose them to the ridicule of men, who could not be persuaded out of the truth of things so recent and public; and, therefore, whilst they were labouring to extirpate Christianity by the united powers of violence and fraud, they were forced to leave the works of Christ to bear witness of him;—they were forced to own that those things were true, which all men saw and heard, that the blind received

their sight, and the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard, and the dead were raised up.

It is equally plain, then, from the testimony of friends and the confession of enemies to the cause of Christianity, that there was no fallacy or imposture in the miracles of Christ. One would think, therefore, that the matter was here decided, and that no man would dare to deny the divine mission of our Saviour, and the truth of his religion. But infidelity springs from the corruption of the heart, which blinds the understanding, and, therefore, is not to be convinced by the clearest arguments. It has its subterfuges and lurking-places, as well as its strong-holds, and, when driven from one, never fails to take shelter in the other.

When, therefore, the evidence, upon which our Saviour's miracles rests, could not be shaken or invalidated; it has been pretended, 5thly, that there are in nature certain necessary and fixed laws, which they never saw altered, which, therefore, they think cannot be altered, and, consequently, that there can be no such thing as miracles.

But say, thou daring and profane infidel, what are these fixed laws of nature but the absolute will and appointment of God, acting upon matter, which is itself incapable of any laws or fixed order? Where then is the difficulty of supposing that He, who first made, and preserves still, these great laws by which nature is governed, can also alter them, if He thinks fit?

Canst thou, contrary to the established law of gravitation, lift thy impious arm against heaven; and wouldst thou shorten the arm of the Almighty, that he should not be able to suspend those very laws, which he himself established? Shall He, who made yon celestial bodies to move in their orbits, be unable to say, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou "moon, in the valley of Ajalon?" Shall He, who raised man from the dust, and breathed into him the breath of life, be unable to recall that life, and to say to a dead Lazarus, "Come "forth?" Shall the Creator of the world, in whose book were all thy members written, when as yet there was none of them, be thought unable to restore them to their natural functions;—to make the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the blind to see, and the dumb to speak? Where

—Where then is thy pretended impossibility of miracles?—Cease thy vain and empty cavils, and own with reverence that there is a God who doeth wonders, and has declared his power among the children of men, by a series of most astonishing operations, equally beneficial to the bodies and convincing to the souls of men.

Upon the whole, then, I think I may fairly be allowed to conclude, in defiance of all the attacks of infidelity, that the evidence of our Saviour's miracles is clear and incontestible, and that by his almighty word the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the dead were raised; and that, therefore, he was He that should come, the promised Messias.

And though, indeed, we do not, like the Jews and John's disciples, see and hear these things as present before us; yet the accounts of them have been conveyed down to us in a manner so remote from all suspicion, that even infidelity itself wants the brow to call in question its authenticity. Though our faith, therefore, be in this point, as it necessarily must be, traditional; yet it is as strongly grounded as any reasonable man can possibly expect or wish it to be; since we must either admit our Saviour's miracles on

traditional evidence, or reject the whole of our knowledge, which is built exactly on the same foundation.

But here a difficulty occurs, which, though it has not been started, as far as I know, by any infidel writer, may perhaps be thought not undeserving of a short explanation.

Our Saviour, we see, expressly here grounds the proof of his being the Messias, on his performing those miracles, which Isaiah had foretold the promised Saviour should perform: Whence then is it, that we find him, in many other places, endeavouring to conceal his miracles, and strictly charging, that no man should know them?

To understand the reason of this, it will be necessary for us to attend to the following remarks:

1st, That this charge of concealment was never made with respect to the miracles performed by our Saviour amongst the heathens, to whom he openly declared his miraculous power, and proclaimed himself the Messias; as having nothing to fear from their intemperate hatred, or ill-judged zeal.

But,

But, 2dly, The case stood very differently with respect to the Jews, and, therefore, called for the utmost circumspection in our Saviour's conduct. For, whilst, on the one hand, the Scribes and Pharisees and Herodians, who thought that he was come to destroy the law, burned with implacable hatred towards him, and, therefore, were constantly endeavouring to entrap him in his words, seeking to get something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him, and taking counsel together how they might destroy him! on the other hand, another part of the Jewish nation was no less inflamed with an ill-timed zeal, and under a notion of his being a temporal prince and deliverer, when they saw his miracles, wanted to take him by force, and make him a king.

It was, therefore, highly necessary for our Saviour to act with equal caution and circumspection with regard to both parties. He, therefore, seems to have concealed the greatness of his miracles from the one, that they might not through envy be provoked to cut him off before his time was come; and from the other, that they might not be led, from seeing the greatness of his power, to raise tumults and seditions, and, by aiming to establish his kingdom by force, give

a handle to his enemies to accuse him as a disturber of the people.

What has been said would afford a variety of useful reflections; but, having already trespassed too much upon your patience, I shall close the whole with this one weighty observation:—That, as it was no small thing for the great God of heaven and earth to display his almighty arm in the performance of these mighty works; so also it will be no small crime in us to reject or despise a religion founded on such evidence: for, though we may seem, for a short time, to triumph in our wickedness with impunity, we shall, in the end, find, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

SERMON XXI.

2 SAM. i. 23.

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided.

AMIDST the numerous attacks which have been made upon Christianity, in all ages, since its first promulgation, it has sometimes been urged, as a very heavy and capital objection against the sacred writings, that they have, no where, inculcated the duties of friendship, which has ever and deservedly held a distinguished place in the rank of social virtues. But, had the noble writer, who first started, or the herd of ignoble followers, who have since implicitly adopted, this notion, recollected either the numberless precepts of universal benevolence, which are, every where, inculcated in the scriptures; or the examples, still more forcible than

than precept, of the tenderest love and affection, so often displayed in them; I trust we should never have heard of so groundless and frivolous an objection. For surely, when we are commanded to love our very enemies, it is impossible to suppose, that we are not taught to value and esteem our friends, whom nature as well as Christianity, recommends to us: and, when we see the man after God's own heart,—nay, what is more, when we see the Son of God himself, standing amidst a family of sorrow, and paying the just tribute of affection to distressed or divided friendship,—it is still more impossible to suppose, that the duties of friendship are not included in the scripture system.

I need not tell you, that the words of the text are part of David's lamentation over his friends, Saul and Jonathan, who had fallen in an unsuccessful engagement with the Philistines, upon mount Gilboa: nor, perhaps, need I tell you, that this divine elegy of David's has always been deservedly esteemed by the best judges, one of the finest specimens of eastern poetry; as containing sentiments of the utmost tenderness and propriety, expressed in the most beautiful and poetic language.

With

With what a solemn and mournful simplicity the divine threnodist opens the melancholy subject of his sorrows!—"The beauty of Israel is "slain upon thy high places: How are the "mighty fallen!"

And having thus briefly declared the unhappy fate of his beloved friends, the first thought which strikes him, is the joy it would afford to the bitter and inveterate enemies of Israel: He, therefore, breaks out into a natural, though unavailing, wish, that so disgraceful a misfortune should be kept from their knowledge:—"Tell "it not," says he, "in Gath, publish it not in "the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of "the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of "the uncircumcised triumph." He then proceeds, in all the bitterness of sorrow, to pour forth execrations upon the mountains of Israel, which had been the stage of this bloody tragedy; addressing himself to them, by a very noble and animated apostrophe, as if they had been actually present before him:—"Ye mountains of Gilboa, "let there be no dew, neither let there be rain "upon you, nor fields of offerings; for there "the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, "the shield of Saul, as though he had not been "anointed with oil."

Lest,

Lest, however, any should imagine, that this unhappy catastrophe had arisen from the cowardice or imbecility of his beloved friends, he immediately takes occasion to celebrate their military prowess and valour, in terms of the highest commendation:—"From the blood of the slain, "from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jona- "than turned not back, and the sword of Saul "returned not empty: they were swifter than "eagles, they were stronger than lions."

Having then declared the greatness of their mutual love and affection in life, "they were "lovely in their lives," he falls upon an idea of the utmost tenderness, yet which seemed to afford some kind of melancholy pleasure and consolation to his distressed mind: "They were "lovely," says he, "in their lives, and, in "their death, they were not divided;" intimating, that though they were unhappy in falling so immaturely, yet they were at least happy in this respect, that they fell together; that "in "their death they were not divided."

And having now summoned, as a chorus of beauteous mourners, the afflicted daughters of Israel, "to weep over Saul, who clothed them "in scarlet and put ornaments of gold upon "their necks;" he takes his last leave of his poor

poor departed friend, Jonathan, in so pathetic and moving a manner, as would raise pity and compassion, even in the breast where they had been strangers before:—"How are the mighty "fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, "thou wast slain in thy high places! I am dis- "tressed for thee, my brother Jonathan! Very "pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to "me was wonderful, passing the love of wo- "men. How art the mighty fallen, and the "weapons of war perished!"

The words of the text thus explained, obviously led me to consider,

First, The blessings and advantages of a well-grounded Christian friendship.

Secondly, The misery and misfortune of being deprived of it.

And, thirdly, To offer a few words of consolation to those, who, like David, mourn in anguish over the memory of the friend they loved.

By friendship, I would be understood to mean a reciprocation of esteem and affection, founded on a similitude of virtuous and amiable qualities:

lities:—I say, virtuous and amiable qualities:—for though, I well know, there are what are called friendships, founded on very different principles; such as a similitude of vicious inclinations, a regard to self-interest, or an insidious hypocrisy; yet I would no more dignify these with the sacred name of friendship, than the wretched associations of midnight ruffians to assassinate, or of lawless banditti to plunder.

The first advantage of a virtuous friendship is, that it increases our happiness, by adding to the enjoyments of life.

Man is formed for society, and he cannot be happy without it. The first emotion our hearts feel, is the desire of attaching themselves to some other heart; says an amiable writer*. The riches of Golconda, or the pleasures of paradise, would be alike tasteless, if they were to be possessed, like the treasures of the miser, without a sharer. Nay, even the very misanthrope himself cannot enjoy his gloomy and peculiar species of happiness, without society: for, though he wishes not to communicate pleasure to any, yet he must himself want the only joy he is capable of feeling, that of giving vent to his malignant spleen, if placed in a state of solitude.

* March. of Lambert.

It

It is not, however, in the crouds that surround us that we are to look for the happiness arising from friendship. The greater part of the world are as incapable as they are undeserving of friendship. We must, therefore, look for nearer and better associates, to share with us the blessings of life. Some, nature has provided for us, at our entrance into life, under the various ties of cognation: others we provide for ourselves, who are united to us by affinity, or the stronger bands of a similitude of sentiments and inclinations. And from these it is we receive an increase of happiness, in every blessing we enjoy. For whilst, as it were from a common center, we diffuse the beams of pleasure on the small circle of friends that surround us, we, at the same time, share their enjoyments, and receive an additional warmth, from the reflected irradiations of love and esteem.

A second advantage of friendship is, that it lessens misery, by dividing our griefs.

Griefs we all must have. Some, the wisdom of God has annexed to our being, and others, the villainy of man will ever take care that we shall not want. It is, therefore, of all consolations the greatest, to have a friend, who will share

share with us in our sorrows, and is ever ready "to weep with them that weep." We therefore naturally fly to the ear of friendship on such occasions, and find an incredible relief in pouring forth the tale of distress. Nay, when our breasts throb with anguish, and the burden of sorrow is too heavy for us to bear, we find it become lighter even by the sympathy of indifferent persons. And how much greater, then, must be the alleviation, when the balm of friendship, that medicine of life, as the Son of Syrach elegantly calls it, is added to the common sympathy of humanity! Nor is it in the misfortunes of life only, that we feel the advantage of a sincere friend: "on some fond breast even the "parting soul relies*." The hand of friendship will equally cherish and support us, in the last great trial of nature, and in the hour of death. For, to borrow an expression of the poet's, "Friendship, like hope, travels through, "nor quits us when we die."

A third advantage of friendship is the benefit of sincere and necessary advice.

The language of St. Paul, on another occasion, may, not unfitly, be applied to the present:

* Gray.

"We

"We see, here, through a glass darkly:" our prospect of things is so obscured by prejudices, passions, and intervening shades of one kind or other, that we seldom see them in their proper colours, or natural positions. It is, therefore, of the utmost consequence, to have a faithful friend at hand, who will guard us from the dangers we are every moment incurring, who will point out our true interest to us, who will divest us of our hurtful prepossessions, and who will take the pains to lead us out of the paths of error and delusion.

And, if this advice be so necessary and useful in our temporal interests, it is still more so in our eternal ones. We have all of us many temptations in life to encounter; we have many dangerous and insidious adversaries; we have a feeble and pliant portion of reason; we have headstrong and ensnaring passions; we have a heart, deceitful above all things; a tongue, prompt to utter, and a hand ever too ready to execute, what is wicked or dishonourable. Happy the man, therefore, who has found that counsellor of a thousand, who will stand his friend in such dangers, and take the part of his soul, against the world, the flesh, and the devil; who will stop his arm, when uplifted to swallow the poison of corruption; who will support his steps, when

tottering on the brink of perdition; who will rouse his slumbering faculties, and invigorate his languishing piety; who will point out to him the deformity and danger of sin, and, like a guardian angel, beckon him forward to the gate of heaven. These are noble offices of friendship indeed; as much exceeding those, which are commonly practised as the soul is more noble than the body, or the circle of eternity exceeds the span of life. Too seldom, indeed, they are thought of in this age of folly, when, by a preposterous kind of computation, temporal interests are thought of more value than eternal ones, a mortal and frail body preferable to an immortal soul. Yet a wise heathen thought them of so much consequence, that he expressly includes, in his definition of friendship, a consent in divine, as well as human matters*, and lays it down, as an indispensable duty of friendship, both to give and receive advice in both.

A fourth advantage of friendship arises from an union of abilities and power.

The powers of man are inadequate to his necessities, when single and solitary. His wants, therefore, as well as his natural inclinations,

* Divinarum humanarumque rerum consensio.
Cicero de Amicitia.

drive

drive him to seek for society, and his weakness will as strongly incline him to seek for the support of friendship in that society: for, without such a support, he would, like an insulated column, be unable to sustain the shocks and outrages of men, and the changes and chances of the world. But when he is conscious that he has a friend, who will share with him in all difficulties, who will stand by him with united heart and strength, he will prosecute the business of life with firmness and vigour, and, therefore, will seldom fail of success. It happened, indeed, otherwise, to the unfortunate friends, who were the subject of David's lamentation. They fought with united hearts and hands, yet fought unsuccessfully. This, however, will rarely be the case. And even with respect to them, we cannot doubt but that Saul must have received unspeakable comfort from reflecting that his faithful and beloved son was engaged in the same cause with himself, and that Jonathan had no less pleasure in knowing that he was defending the life of a parent, who would never leave him or forsake him: and, though finally they failed of the just rewards of their valour, to answer the wise designs of providence, in transferring the kingdom to another family, yet they had, at least, this reward of their piety, that they escaped the misery of a survival, which, on either

side, must have been bitter and excruciating; "in their death they were not divided."

This leads me to consider, secondly, The misery and misfortune of being deprived of a sincere and well-grounded friendship.

And here, I am sensible, I must enter upon a task little agreeable to the tender feelings of every human breast. For few, I fear, there are among us, so completely happy, as never to have felt the bitter pangs of such a separation from those we loved. The wound of anguish, will, therefore, naturally bleed afresh, and the stream of sorrow be renewed, at the recollection of so painful an event. Yet it is a recollection sometimes necessary, and always useful, if we have the wisdom to apply it to its proper purpose, that is, if we are taught by it to number our own days, and to apply our hearts unto wisdom.

To see a man, who is the most perfect stranger to us, sunk under the power and tyranny of death, and stripped, in one moment, of every joy and comfort in life, is a sight shocking enough to human nature, on account of the near relation we bear to him, as one of our fellow-creatures. To see a neighbour under the same circumstances, is still more shocking, because

cause of our familiarity and acquaintance with him. But when the connection comes nearer home to ourselves; when we see the friend we loved, lying pale and breathless before us, insensible of all the pleasure he could once give or receive; when, for example, the helpless orphan weeps over the grave of an affectionate parent, or, what is more shocking to humanity, when the disconsolate parent is doomed to see the order of nature, as it were, inverted, and to follow a beloved child to his long home, withered in his prime, and blasted like an untimely flower; or when, again, the mournful widow, deprived of a faithful partner, is compelled to water her solitary couch with her tears, or an afflicted husband to lament over the ashes of a beloved wife: these are circumstances of misery and distress, which neither language is able to express, nor imagination to conceive.

And we have, in such circumstances, not only the misery of losing the friend we loved, but we have also the misfortune of being deprived of all the advantages of a well-founded friendship. For where is then, the chearful companion, to share with us in the innocent and virtuous joys of life? Where is the faithful hand, to support us in the changes and chances of fortune? Where is the friendly counsellor, to advise and instruct

instruct us in all our difficulties, and to guide our steps through the rugged paths of an earthly pilgrimage, to the land of promise? These, and many more advantages, the devouring grave has swallowed up with our friend, and we are left to force our way through life, as well as we are able, exposed to the insults of fortune, and the treachery of enemies, feeble and unsupported, void of counsel, and with all the anguish of a divided affection and wounded heart.

Yet let not the child of sorrow, on such occasions, lie down in despair, or yield to the impulses of an unavailing regret. In the language of the Gospel, let him be sorry, "but not as "men without hope." He has lost indeed, perhaps, an invaluable treasure, which it would be a brutal insensibility not to bewail. Yet let him remember, that he has still a friend in heaven, superior, in power and ability, to all the united strength of earthly connections. He has there a Father, ever ready to hear his cry; a Son, ever disposed to intercede for his infirmities; and a Holy Spirit, ever at hand to support him in his distresses, and guide him in his difficulties. Thither, therefore, let him fly for comfort: let him "acquaint himself with God, and be at "peace."

2dly,

2dly, Let the loss of our friends teach us this important lesson, not to set our affections on things below. The great and irreversible law of nature is this: "Man that is born of a woman "hath but a short time to live, and is full of "misery: he cometh up, and is cut down like "a flower, he fleeth as it were a shadow, and "never continueth in one stay." Whatever, therefore, may be our most valuable enjoyments in life, let us never forget, that mortality is inscribed upon them in the most legible characters. Our affections, therefore, should be taught to aspire to something more fixed and permanent: they should rise from this vale of change and chance, to a serener and better climate, from the vain and mortal creature, to the great and immortal Creator.

3dly, Let us not sorrow for our departed friends "as men without hope."

Melancholy must have been the situation of the poor heathen, who beheld the dear objects of his affection successively torn from him by death, and committed to that dust, from which he could have no certain hope of ever seeing them return. But the religion we profess, as it teaches the noblest lessons of friendship, so it also gives us the surest comfort under the loss of it;

it; by teaching us, that "as in Adam all die, "even so in Christ shall all be made alive." For surely, when we reflect that the friends we have lost are gone before us but a little way;—that their sun is set, only to rise again with increased splendor;—and that the hour is coming, when it is in our power to meet again, never to feel a second separation: we must acknowledge, that these are thoughts sufficient to disarm death of its sting, and sorrow of its pain.

But lastly, let us remember, that, though we must meet again, yet there is but one way, by which we can meet again with comfort.

The momentary separation of a mortal body, at the hour of death, we well know, is sufficiently painful to the breast of friendship. But alas! what is it, when compared to the everlasting separation of soul from soul, at the day of judgment! And yet this is a separation which must take place, if we are not careful to follow the good examples of those who have gone before us in the christian race. Whenever, therefore, our devotion flags, or our virtue is in danger, let these considerations have their due weight upon our minds: Have I a wish to be united to the parent, the child, the friend, the husband I loved? Can I stand the shocking thought

thought of having all my crimes and follies laid open to their view, before men and angels? Can I sustain the idea of being torn from them for ever and ever? Can I support the horrors of being sentenced, in their presence, to a state of endless torments? And, if these weighty considerations have the happy effect of keeping us stedfast in our duty, or add even a little force to the various arguments in favour of a virtuous life, then the friends we lament will not have died in vain. We shall mourn over their ashes with a decent and pious sorrow; we shall catch the flame of virtue from a recollection of their departed excellencies; we shall labour, like them, to stand foremost in the christian race, and to excel in the discharge of every moral and christian duty, being fully assured, that, though we have been, for a few short moments, divided from them by death, yet we shall, by thus copying their good examples, be united to them again for ever, by a joyful resurrection to life eternal.

END OF VOL. I.

Printed by Bye and Law, St. John's Square, Clerkenwell.